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# Laura Bush and Hillary Clinton: Helpmates to resident or role models for nations women?

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Laura Bush and Hillary Clinton: Help-mates to Presidents or Role Models for the Nation's Women?

Laura Bush and Hillary Clinton:  
Help-mates to Presidents or Role Models for the Nation's Women?

By

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Laura Bush and Hillary Clinton: Help-mates to Presidents or Role Models for the Nation's Women?

ABSTRACT

DONNELLY, BROOKE Laura Bush and Hillary Clinton: Help-mates to Presidents or Role Models for the Nation's Women? Department of Political Science June 2012.

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In spite of the fact that First Ladies are usually depicted as just helpmates to their husbands, they can in fact be very powerful figures, even if only as symbols. Indeed, First Ladies are free to mold, shape and define their role how they choose. Throughout history, we have seen First Ladies act in a variety of ways: some use the platform as a way to promote non-partisan issues; others focus on being symbols for the perfect American mother and wife; and there are few activist First Ladies who get involved in partisan politics. But although free to shape their own role as First Ladies, these very visible women have been highly scrutinized and criticized when they are seen to stray away from the "idealized American woman." In this very important way, these prominent and successful women have been constrained by society's expectations. How do First Ladies differently deal with these constraints and possibilities? Their choices, in fact, have the potential to hurt the progression of women's powers and leadership in America. I have researched and compared two diametrically opposed First Ladies—Hillary Clinton and Laura Bush—to examine how First Ladies might be exemplary female leaders or simply helpmates to the male President.

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## INTRODUCTION

*Over the years, the role of First Lady has been perceived as largely symbolic. She is expected to represent an ideal—and largely mythical—concept of American womanhood. Many former First Ladies were highly accomplished, but true stories of what they had done in their lives were overlooked, forgotten or suppressed. By the time I was preparing to take on the role, history was finally catching up to reality. In March 1992, the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History revised its popular First Ladies Exhibit to acknowledge the varied political roles and public images of these women. In addition to gowns and china, the museum displayed the camouflage jacket Barbara Bush wore when she visited the troops of Desert Storm with her husband and featured a quote from Martha Washington: "I am more like a state prisoner than anything else". The exhibit's chief curator, Edith Mayo, and the Smithsonian were criticized for rewriting history and demeaning the "family values" of the First Ladies –Hillary Clinton (2003, 119).*

As a female growing up in America, the First Lady has always been one of my biggest, woman role models. She is the closest we have seen today to a female national leader in America. For years, America has battled with the role of a First Lady because there is no concrete definition or handbook on how to be an American First Lady. Therefore, the First Lady has some freedom to decide what role she wants in the White House. However, we have seen that First Ladies are constrained by dominant cultural ideals about American womanhood. Consequently, First Ladies must choose their role in the White House carefully if they are concerned about their popularity with the public. Many First Ladies have chosen the traditional role as a wife—a supporter of their husband and family. Meanwhile, other First Ladies have taken their inherited role as a public figure and used it as an opportunity to promote an issue they feel passionate about. For example, Nancy Reagan had a drug awareness campaign, "Just Say No," that started in 1982 and became her main initiative while in the White House. As media has grown in society the influence of

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First Ladies has increased and therefore, more and more, First Ladies have become “issue First Ladies.” However, two First Ladies, Eleanor Roosevelt and Hillary Rodham Clinton, redefined the role for themselves and became “pioneer” First Ladies with substantial influence in the White House; they each also used their role as First Lady to help launch their own political careers. Despite their personal success, both Roosevelt and Clinton received tremendous criticism for their non-traditional roles in the White House.

Scholars have found that because of the First Lady's relationship to the President, she has an unavoidable role in the White House and she is often judged as a political figure. Sulfaro, a Political Science professor at James Madison University, explains, “while most First Ladies try to avoid politics and seek out political causes that are not controversial, they still should tend to be associated with partisan politics because of their intimate connection with a partisan regime” (Sulfaro, 2007: 487). This is a reality that many First Ladies cannot escape. As very visible female public figures, First Ladies are role models whether they like it or not. How is the role of First Lady in society helpful for the progression of female leadership in America, and in which ways is it harmful? Are First Ladies exemplary female leaders or simply helpmates to male Presidents? To explore these related questions, I study two recent, diametrically opposed, First Ladies, Hillary Clinton and Laura Bush.

First, it is important to look at how various meanings of feminism restrain or enable First Ladies. And conversely, in which specific ways do First Ladies help the feminist movement and in what ways might they hurt it? I will be looking at Hillary and Laura's experiences as First Ladies in detail, but to get a sense of the definition

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of feminism in terms of First Ladies let us look at the role of First Ladies in general and their overall relationship in the White House to women's rights and to feminism.

A First Lady can help or hurt feminism in two ways—a symbolic way or via policy. Unfortunately, despite progression through the years for women's rights, gay rights, and alternative families, America still promotes and idealizes the “American dream” and traditional family values. We have come to accept and acknowledge families that are different—for example dual income families, families with two moms or two dads, and single parent households, are all commonly accepted in society, but through film, popular culture, and the government we still strongly promote the nuclear family—a stay at home mom, breadwinning dad, and children. Because of the structure, constraints, and influences of a traditional family, many feminists are very critical of the family. Kath Weston, a professor of Women and Gender Studies at University of Virginia, discusses how many feminist have found that, “In their works on kinship they have warned of the twin dangers of ignoring power relations within families and examining familial relations in isolation from relations of power in society at large” (Weston, 1997: 205). Therefore, Weston concludes that families construct unavoidable hierarchies of power and gender roles. Since, the existence of First Ladies in general promotes family, as a role and symbol they consequently promote gender roles and family values.

When we consider feminist criticism of the family, it is difficult to consider the First Lady as being a feminist role model—being a “First Lady” automatically promotes family and gender roles. If we put that aside though and try to dissect

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what First Ladies have done with their role and how it has helped women either as symbol of leadership and power or through actual policy, we can consider the First Lady as a role with feminist potential.

Historically, there have been different types of First Ladies. Some have set feminist examples in the White House by promoting female leadership and policies that help women. Throughout time, First Ladies have gained more power, respect and roles in the White House. Eleanor Roosevelt is one of the most distinct First Ladies. She helped shape the role and helped women in many ways. First of all, she fought for policies she truly believed in, many helping the poor and women, without the consent or good wishes of her husband. For example, she was truly innovative and independent as she gained confidence through her role as First Lady. Eleanor had a true sense that the role of First Lady was one where, too often, women were used. She had no desire to be First Lady and therefore took the opportunity to “use it—on the side of causes she believe in—rather than let it use her” (Caroli, 2011: 194). From the beginning of her role as First Lady, she set a tone of independence and strength; as stated earlier, she did not allow the position to “use” her and thus she fully intended to keep her teaching job. However, as many First Ladies have come to realize, their job in Washington is time consuming, and Eleanor did ultimately give up her teaching job. Even though she left her teaching job in New York City, she still made sure she was busy with independent projects in Washington. She wrote columns and began lecturing in order to keep her independence. Through these roles she was able to help women by being a leader

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and role model. And furthermore, through her independent attitude and role she promoted policies that did help women, making her a truly feminist First Lady.

With their policies, the Roosevelts especially helped poor women and workingwomen. During the Great Depression a mother's salary could help a family from starving, and Eleanor worked hard to help rid society of its negative attitudes towards workingwomen. She also influenced Roosevelt's New Deal policy. She fought hard to make sure that labor laws and programs offered the same rights and opportunities for women as they did men. For example, when the Civilian Conservation Corps had opportunities for young men to get out of cities and earn money, she made sure the same was available for women. Eleanor's causes were not only to benefit women she also made sure young people received proper opportunity and assistance. She influenced Franklin immensely in his endorsement of the National Youth Administration, a program that helped young people find jobs and assist those who could not. Although now she is considered one of the most influential and important First Ladies, at the time she received an abundance of criticism and was a very polarizing First Lady; thus many First Ladies after her have been cautious to take on such an aggressive role (Caroli, 2011).

Besides Eleanor and Hillary, most First Ladies have used the role to promote a cause important to them but take care to not be seen as controversial. Assisting their husbands and promoting their causes gives First Ladies recognition and power. It is undoubtedly a position of power for women with the opportunity to help women and feminism through leadership and policy, however it also is one that promotes and echoes American family values and gender roles. It can be a launching

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pad for independent successful careers, as it helped Hillary and Eleanor, but so many First Ladies have chosen not to take on their own ambitions after the White House. Comparing Hillary and Laura's roles and influence we will see how the role needs to transform to either being one that is credited with the power and responsibility it deserves—(how about a pay check for all their hard work?) or one that is not required. First Ladies should be able to continue their independent lives and roles and not be forced to become helpmates of their husbands in the White House.

The point, the method, and the reality of feminism and women's movements are that in order to be productive we and more specifically, First Ladies, need to shake things up. When you cause controversy, have lovers and haters, and make a scene, people listen; people are inspired and things change. It takes a fight to knock down the doors that have never been opened for women and that is what the position of First Lady needs; it needs fighter, shaker, and mover. People can criticize Hillary Clinton and Eleanor Roosevelt but their polarization creates conversation, creates passion and helps redefine gender roles. The social norms of America are hard, maybe even impossible, to eradicate, but the role of First Lady can be used as a stepping stone for women in leadership positions and the ever changing role of a First Lady will ultimately help to redefine gender roles in society. Hopefully, so much that one-day there too will be a First Man or even more shocking a single President? A President without children? Can you imagine? Through the contrast of both Laura Bush and Hillary Clinton we learn how a First Lady can be used to help feminism but it is also a role that can be a step backwards in the women's

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movement. Analyzing both their positions shows how we, Americans, need to reconsider how we see, define, and constrain the role of First Lady; First Ladies must stop tolerating America's restricted image of the ideal woman.

Despite growing up in the same time period (1950s), with relatively similar gender roles, the two First Ladies I have chosen to analyze played distinctive roles in the White House; Laura Bush served as a traditional First Lady whose primary role was to support her husband. She was George W. Bush's helpmate, companion and served as a motherly figure for the nation. Meanwhile Hillary Clinton seemingly exemplifies the ultimate female feminist and as First Lady she politicized the office by taking an active political role. She was assigned leadership roles in the White House, for example, running healthcare for Bill Clinton's administration and working on adoption reform. Her active role in the White House although polarizing ultimately helped her launch her own political career. The American population received Laura and Hillary's differences quite contrarily. Hillary Clinton is considered a polarizing figure while Laura Bush was loved across parties. I chose Bush and Clinton because their backgrounds, although different in ways, had similarities and they were both First Ladies for two terms. Although Michelle Obama has also proven herself to be a very interesting First Lady, I chose not to look at her in detail because we do not know yet how her role will be entirely received or played out. When examining Michelle's role we would also have to analyze how race is factored into how she is received. However, I will use my analysis of Laura and Hillary to make some predictions and comments on Michelle Obama's current role in the White House.

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Finally, I will analyze the current First Lady's role and the role of potential First Ladies in the current Republican primaries. How have these potential First Ladies roles emulated those of Hillary and Laura's and how have they differed? From analyzing the current situation and comparing it to those of Laura's and Hillary's I will be able to have a better understanding of how the role of First Lady is transforming or not in America.

To explore these questions I will first look at the importance of the potential First Lady throughout her spouse's campaign. First Ladies are heavily analyzed and critiqued on a campaign and are used as political tools throughout the race. Laura and Hillary were seen very differently on the campaign trail. Although Laura did not play as large a role actively campaigning, her presence and image were positive for George during his campaign. Hillary faced scrutiny and her ability to be a "motherly" figure for America was questioned. She ultimately had to soften her image to positively represent her husband. By examining the role of First Ladies on the campaign trail I will be able to see if they are being used or if their role exemplifies leadership and influence. Furthermore, I will explore America's desire for an ideal American woman in the White House and what that ideal is. The contrast of Laura and Hillary on the campaign trail will be used to define the complex role of the First Lady and the importance of a First Lady to the American people. Ironically, the First Lady role can both hurt women rights and feminism in our country but still be a stepping-stone to individual woman leadership and power.

To contrast Laura and Hillary further I will examine their roles in the White House. What did each woman specifically do while there? After looking at the roles

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they took on, I will then look at Americans' reactions to their very different roles and explore what these roles and reactions say about the importance and power of a First Lady. After exploring the distinct positions of Laura and Hillary while in the White House, I will then examine how they each used or did not use their experiences in the White House as a stepping-stone to their own political career. Hillary is the best example and seemingly the only one besides Eleanor Roosevelt to truly use her experiences as First Lady as prerequisites to her own, very successful political career. However contrary, Laura did not attempt to have her own political office but most likely would have been successful because she was hugely popular.

Finally, I will compare the ways in which Hillary and Laura were important and influential in the White House and will use my findings to analyze the way in which First Ladies define and reflect American womanhood. Looking at the current primaries and Michelle Obama's role, I will be able to see how the First Lady has come to define the modern idealized American woman. Through this research, I will learn if the womanhood the First Lady promotes is modern or if it is outdated and hindering the evolvment and empowerment of American women in politics.

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### CHAPTER 1: Visibility of First Ladies in Political Campaigns

In recent years, the Presidential candidates' spouses have been huge factors on the campaign trail: "First Ladies nowadays are fixtures on the campaign trail, appearing in campaign advertisements, traveling with their spouses, making introductions at major events, and occasionally speaking for their spouses when necessary" (Sulfaro, 2007: 488). Many Americans wonder, if a wife does not support their husband then why should they? Therefore, if a would-be First Lady does not get involved with her husband's campaign, her unwillingness to support partisan politics is viewed unfavorably. For example, Howard Dean's wife chose to stay home and continue her medical practice during her husband's campaign and this choice was viewed extremely unfavorably by American voters and was a notable factor in the downfall of Howard Dean's campaign. Furthermore, not only does a potential First Lady need to support her husband but she also needs to fit an ideal image of an American woman. Hillary and Laura were very different characters. Although they both supported their husbands on the campaign trail, the media portrayed them quite differently throughout the race. After analyzing both their roles on the campaign trail, it is clear that candidates use their wives as political puppets to help them win the nomination. Additionally, a First Lady is judged heavily on her physical characteristics and ways in which she fits the traditional American woman mold. For years the traditional American woman has been a supportive, submissive, wife and mother. After examining Hillary and Laura's roles on the campaign trail it is clear that a feminine, motherly and timid First Lady is still more attractive in America today than a powerful, independent and strong one. Hillary was much more

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polarizing and scrutinized on the campaign trail than Laura. Because of her strong and independent personality she was ultimately forced to prove her “femininity” in order for her husband to win the election.

To look at the conflicting roles of power and femininity on the trail to the White House, I am going to first examine Hillary Clinton's role on the campaign trail. Although throughout history, potential First Ladies have played substantial roles campaigning for their husbands, the 1992 election was when many researchers, pollsters and Americans took note of the intense impact that the would-be First Lady has on the campaign (Burrell et al, 2009). Hillary and Barbara Bush were distinct First Ladies with opposite roles—Barbara was the traditional homemaker and Hillary was the career mom and breadwinner in her family. The 1990s were a time when more and more women were staying in the workforce even after having children. However, even with the rising trend of the “modern” workingwoman, Hillary Clinton still faced vast criticisms. Compared to Barbara Bush she was portrayed as a radical, anti-family, working woman who could ruin America's conservative vision of an idealistic woman and First Lady.

During the beginning of Bill's campaign, the Clinton campaign used the strategy that Hillary and Bill were a “package” deal. Many feminists admired Hillary and therefore liked the idea that a vote for Bill was a vote for Hillary. However, traditionalists found this idea radical and the couple was forced to change their message. In July of 1992 the *New York Times* reported “the couple's early ‘buy one get one free’ approach soured when voters began viewing Mrs. Clinton as a hardheaded careerist who dominated her mate and seemed contemptuous of

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ordinary housewives" (Stanley, 1992: B1). The Clintons, especially Hillary, realized quickly that "Her proud 'you vote for him, you get me' stump lines offended some, and she was unmistakably squelched. She dutifully lowered her profile and stuck to remote campuses" (Kasindorf, 1993). This idea that the Clintons were equals was one that continued throughout the campaign and while in the White House.

Nonetheless, during the campaign Hillary had to prove that she was also capable of being the traditional First Lady that Americans desired. Sadly, Hillary acknowledged that she realized early on in the campaign "that Americans seem to believe that 'choices are O.K. for everybody except the President's wife'" (Stanley, 1992: B1).

The fact that Hillary had to tone down her own accomplishments, speaks loudly about American sexism. Hillary and Bill were equally qualified to be President. The only career difference was that Hillary, unlike Bill, had spent most of her working years in the private sector. She was a very successful lawyer in Arkansas and ultimately became partner. She was the breadwinner of their family and was just as knowledgeable about government and American politics as Bill was. By the time she was 25 she had more experience working on campaigns and for not-for-profits than most people ever will. She even had experience in DC working as a lawyer for the impeachment of Richard Nixon (Clinton, 2003). Although some people admired Hillary Clinton for her feminist ideals and ambitions, many Americans were not ready to have a First Lady anywhere near the steering wheel. Therefore, Hillary Clinton became one of the most polarizing First Ladies on the campaign trail and in the White House, demonstrating that sexism still exists in America.

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As a “good wife” would do, Hillary quickly attempted to change her image on the campaign trail. This shift shows how the First Lady can be, and perhaps has to be, used as a political tool on the campaign trail in order for her husband to win. From what people had known about Hillary, they were worried she was not going to be able to fit the traditional role of a First Lady because the typical and ideal role of First Lady in Arkansas was one she disdained. An article written in the *Las Vegas Review* in 1992 states:

Hillary Clinton, the first career woman who will become America's First Lady, hardly seems to fit the stereotype of the enduring, yet somewhat anachronistic, title. And based on her performance in the Arkansas governor's mansion, where she disdained the social requirements of being the governor's wife, Hillary Clinton will put her own stamp on the job (Saul, 1992).

The question if Hillary would be able to fit the traditional role of a First Lady was one that worried many Americans during the campaign, and the Clintons had to work hard to change her persona to win acceptance. Saul illustrates how she attempted to transform:

The woman who used her maiden name, Hillary Rodham, during her husband's first term as governor, under went a metamorphosis on the Presidential campaign trail. Outwardly, she changed her image from that of assertive career woman to political wife. Many saw it as an indication she can graciously fulfill the traditional role of First Lady, hosting state dinners, making public appearances alongside her husband, and dressing appropriately, albeit not in the name designer style of Nancy Reagan (Saul, 1992).

The irony that Hillary faced on the campaign is that she was a strong, independent, career woman, working-mother, who many feminists adored, but she had to alter this whole persona in order to have a chance at becoming First Lady. Ultimately,

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Hillary gained a lot of experience and publicity from being First Lady that helped her launch her own political career. However, the steps she took to get there were backwards steps away from feminist ideals.

Throughout the democratic primary and in the beginning of the general election, Hillary Clinton was considered an asset for the Democrats. A *New York Times* article from August 1992, *Legal Scholars See Distortion in Attack on Hillary Clinton*, points out how Hillary's "aggressive campaign style and dedication to children's causes seemed a political asset for Democrats at the beginning of the campaign season" (Lewin, 1992: A1) but the Republicans shockingly categorized her work with children as anti-family and pointed out that their overall strategy was to "paint Mrs. Clinton as a radical feminist, in contrast with her Republican counterparts: Barbara Bush, the quintessential grandmother, and Marilyn Quayle, who, like Mrs. Clinton, is a lawyer but has put aside her own career to support her husband's" (Lewin, 1992: A1). Lewin's article points out that many family lawyers have studied Hillary's work and unlike the Republicans attacking her, "experts in family law say the views Mrs. Clinton expressed in her articles have never been perceived as radical by lawyers in the field and are being seriously misstated by her critics" (Lewin, 1992: A12). Many have concluded that this unfair evaluation of her positive and impressive work stems from the conservative American family ideal. Hillary does not fit the typical stereotype of a wife nor the gender roles in society and therefore is attacked for being anti-family, "Many of Mrs. Clinton's admirers say efforts to portray her as anti-family are measure of the conservatives' unwillingness to accept working mothers, who make up a majority of mothers in the United States"

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(Lewin ,1992: A12). The criticism Hillary received was around a positive issue, children and family, which is an issue that many conservative First Ladies have also believed in. However, Hillary was criticized and the fact that she did not fit the image of an ideal American woman can be seen as a reason for Americans' scrutiny.

One of the most famous examples of when Hillary was forced to prove her "femininity" and qualifications on the campaign trail was in the cookie war with Barbara Bush. In July of 1992, right before the conventions, a women's magazine *Family Circle* sponsored a cookie recipe contest between Hillary and Barbara. This was a moment for Hillary to prove her homemaker abilities. Hillary, who had been out of the limelight for a few months, was eager and ready to return once again, but this time not "taunting 'if you elect Bill, you will get me,' or alluding to how she will reshape the role of the First Lady" (Lehrman, 1992). Entering the general election, her role as a would-be First Lady had been reduced to "a voice for children" and a seemingly important, media hogging, cookie baking contest against Barbara Bush. This return into the spotlight was not just about showing off her baking skills, but also her new look:

She's softened her hair, wardrobe and makeup and even seems to have abandoned her yuppie headband all with the none-too-subtle intent of making her appear more maternal, domestic, average, likeable (Lehrman, 1992).

This change was upsetting to many, both on the feminist side and on the traditionalist side. However, it was one that was necessary to prove her capability of fulfilling the traditional role of First Lady. Karen Lehrman, in this article, goes on to condemn the Clintons with their condescending switch, but also says how voters do

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not consider "the governing couple" when the wife is running for office and therefore they should not when a man is. Lehrman's argument suggests that the role of First Lady should not be so restricting and perhaps diminished all together. However, unfortunately, it is clear we are far away from allowing the Presidential candidate's spouse to live a free and independent life. After comparing Laura and Hillary's roles on the campaign trail, it is clear that the would-be First Lady plays a huge role on the campaign trail today.

The negative reaction by many of the Clintons redefined campaign approach even further shows the sexism that exists in this country and especially in terms of the First Lady. Because of this, Hillary Clinton's experience on the campaign was frustrating. A powerful, threatening woman on the campaign trail, like Hillary, can seemingly never do anything right in the eyes of most American voters. Ironically, it was America's reaction to Hillary's substantial and powerful role on the campaign that forced her to reduce her image and once doing that the American people responded as if she were being hypocritical and condescending.

Furthermore, the role of First Lady can be one that gives women power and influence. It can also be argued as the second most important role in the White House. Caroli in her analysis of First Ladies in *First Ladies From Martha Washington to Michelle Obama*, writes:

The First Lady, with little public debate and no constitutional amendments, evolved a role of considerable power. Both outspoken Eleanor Roosevelt and reticent Bess Truman were named during their husbands' administrations as among the 'most powerful people in Washington', while the vice Presidents were conspicuously absent from such lists (XVII).

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Therefore, it makes sense that we analyze and critique the First Lady on the campaign trail.

The cookie war exemplifies in many ways the ideals that American voters have for the First Lady. The fact that a magazine would sponsor a cookie contest between the First Ladies demonstrates that the women's cookie baking skills are of more interest to the readers than their past experience as career women. This is just a specific example of the many ways in which Hillary tried to change her image as a First Lady candidate. She also started emphasizing the importance of family. In interviews she would make sure to discuss her role as a mother, something she before preferred to keep private (Stanley, 1992). She tried to put an emphasis on shopping, clothes, hair and having fun. However, it was clear that this change of heart not the real Hillary and that frustrated her original feminists supporters (Stanley, 1992). Despite Hillary's transformation, Hillary still remained on the top of polls for most controversial Presidential candidate's spouse (Burrell et al, 2009).

Unlike Hillary Clinton, Laura Bush did not have as many polarizing qualities. She played the traditional role of a First Lady candidate: stay-at-home-mom, supporter of her husband, and promoter of a single issue. Her issue was reading and literacy among Americans. Her caring motherly traits made her much more appealing to American voters across party lines. Burrell et al, in a journal study of would-be First Ladies examines polls conducted on would-be First Ladies. Depending on the outspokenness and polarization of a candidate they have more targeted questions. For example, questions on Hillary Clinton were tailored specifically for her. In the research of Burrell et al, they found that there were many

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questions asked about Hillary's involvement in the Whitewater Scandal. In addition, like-wise there were many tailored questions about Tipper Gore during the 2000 Presidential race. For example, poll questions were often asked about her depression or on her opinion on warning labels on rock music CDs. Contrarily there were no questions tailored towards Laura Bush, showing "that during the Bush governorship of Texas she had not been involved in or outspoken about any controversial public policy issues" (Burrell et al, 2009: 18). Her time as First Lady was spent mostly promoting non-threatening issues like reading and literacy, thus the American public was not concerned about her influence in the White House. Laura Bush has proved to be one of the least polarizing First Ladies; Burrell et al found that she was in fact the only non-polarizing First Lady. She of course had overwhelming support of Republicans but independents and democrats were interestingly practically equally as favorable of Laura Bush (Burrell et al, 2009).

On the campaign trail Laura was very active in supporting her husband. However, her participation was not over-eager; she was rather reluctant. When she was First Lady of Texas, and for the eight years she was First Lady of the United States, she was very uncontroversial and was not considered a policy First Lady. Nonetheless, because of her popularity she was forced to take on responsibility on the campaign trail. While campaigning she often was independent of her husband acting as a surrogate and discussing his policies and plans (Sulfaro, 2007). Her original reluctance to get involved in the campaign shows that even if spouses do not want to be involved they have to because the American people expect it: "it's more the feeling that the wife should be a more public figure and express herself,"

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says Charles Jones, emeritus professor at the University of Wisconsin. 'Even though you may be reluctant, it's come to be more expected of the First Lady and of the candidate's wife'" (Cryderman, 2000: A6). Therefore, the would-be First Lady becomes a tool and asset to the campaign and Laura's involvement was necessary.

This phenomenon is relatively new; Hillary Clinton was really the first First Lady besides Eleanor Roosevelt to take an active and aggressive role in the campaign. This is a step in the right direction for women's importance and the power of the role of the First Lady. However, Professor Jones points out, "the next step for political wives will be a scenario where they don't get involved in their husbands' political campaigns because they're too busy doing their own thing" (Cryderman, 2000: A6). As we have seen especially from the criticism of Howard Dean's wife for continuing her practice as a doctor while he ran for President; that is not possible today. In order for a First Lady to be received well, be popular, and non-polarizing she must give up her life for her husband. The role of being "needed" gives a First Lady power but the inability for a First Lady to keep her independence also strips the First Lady of her independence, once more showing how conflicting the role really is.

Despite being reluctant to campaign, First Lady Laura Bush's likable personality was a much-needed asset on the campaign trail especially in 2004. In 2000, Laura primarily campaigned with her husband, but in 2004, she had an 80% approval rating, meanwhile her husband's was a fleeting 50%, making her almost stronger without George (Allen, 2004). Therefore she launched an aggressive solo campaign tour in hopes to shed a more positive image on her husband. She traveled

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to 33 states, which included battleground states and states with big cities for raising campaign funds. Her efforts raised \$5.5 million for the campaign and she led 25 rallies, 15 luncheons, 13 evening receptions and 12 dinners (Allen, 2004). She was vital throughout Bush's campaign in 2004.

Laura was used to attract swing voters because she herself was considered more moderate, especially on social issues like abortion and gay marriage. Although she never specifically admitted which issues she did not agree with her husband on, she alluded to it many times, including saying, "I understand why he has the opinions he has. He understands why I have the opinions I have but we don't argue the issues. We've been married too long to spend a lot of time arguing issues. Besides that, we have an opponent to argue the issues with" (Allen, 2004). At her events there were less protestors and opposition because she was considered a non-polarizing figure on the campaign. Therefore, she was a powerful asset who contributed to the campaign in a positive way.

Strategists and Republicans credit Laura single handedly for Bush's success being re-elected: "Later, once they were all safely moved into the White House, Bush's aides agreed that Laura's decision to come aboard the plane marked the turning point in his comeback. For the second time she had become the person most responsible for making that man President of the United States. 'She is', said Mckinnon, 'His safety net for life'" (Gerhart, 2004: 106). So, although Laura Bush is not considered a stereotypically powerful woman like Hillary Clinton is with her law degree and career, she had a tremendous amount of power during her husband's campaign. She evolved into a leader that her husband's presidency was dependent

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on.

Despite Laura and Hillary's active roles on the campaign trail, their leadership was determined by popular opinion. In order to help their husbands, they each had to try and create an image of themselves that conformed to that of the idealized American woman. We see from analyzing the results of the study by Burrell et al that Laura as a political figure was much less polarizing than Hillary Clinton. It makes sense that First Lady Laura, who played the role of a supportive wife and caring mother who would never interfere with her husband's policies, was least polarizing. Meanwhile, Hillary was far from the traditional, idealized, American woman. Therefore, conservatives feared how she would redefine the role of First Lady. Hillary made conservatives uneasy because she was an independent career woman, who was equally, if not more qualified than her husband to make decisions in the White House.

The roles that Bush and Clinton had on their husband's campaign shows how First Ladies are used as political puppets and helpmates for their husbands. After reading and researching about their experiences on the campaign trail it is clear that would-be First Ladies need to transform themselves to be publicly pleasing. This strips them of their voice, individuality, and freedom, which makes the role on the campaign trail one of the most ironic. Finally, we must consider why the American population feels the need to judge and critique the role of a First Lady. The way Laura and Hillary were received by the public on the campaign trail is infuriating and concerning. America needs to learn to accept First Ladies that do not fit the stereotype of the traditional and widely accepted American woman, because that

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stereotype is largely mythical and outdated. Hopefully one day, we as a country will see strong and independent First Ladies like Hillary Clinton as an opportunity for First Ladies and women in general to gain more power in politics.

The power and influence that First Ladies gain is beneficial to feminism despite their carefully shaped images. As the role of the First Lady has evolved its importance for feminism has increased. Furthermore, her role within the White House is also slowly transforming into one with greater official authority. By analyzing Laura and Hillary's roles in the White House, we will be able to further examine the role of First Ladies as exemplary female leaders or helpmates to their male husbands. Although the role of First Lady continues to be one that further promotes the ideal, the leadership position it allows is slowly helping promote women leadership, rights, and feminism in the United States.

## CHAPTER 2: Clinton and Bush and Their Roles in the White House

Just as Clinton and Bush had contrasting roles, personas, and goals on the campaign trail, their time spent in the White House was also very different. Hillary played an active role as a policy aide to her husband, while Laura viewed her role in the White House as a supportive spouse. Laura did everything to help her husband and considered her primary role helping him and raising her children rather than focusing on policy. Thus, just as on the campaign trail, Hillary faced harsh critics and Laura was loved by most.

From the day Bill Clinton was inaugurated, he considered Hillary his “full partner” in the White House. Similar to Bill’s view of Hillary on the campaign trail, Bill saw Hillary as his equal and believed she would be an asset to the White House. Although it is true that Hillary was qualified to be his “full partner” in the White House, it was evident from the criticism she faced on the campaign trail that criticism of her role in the White House would be inevitable. In the beginning, she was fully involved in policy in the White House but after the failure of healthcare reform and harsh critiques and scrutiny, she had to transform her role in the White House by reducing her visibility just as she did on the campaign trail (Caroli, 2010: 308).

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In 1992 when the Clinton campaign ended, Hillary began to prepare for her role as First Lady. However, she was overwhelmed by the thought of doing so. She gave up her life as all First Ladies have, and officially resigned from her law practice. She started to put a staff together for the White House and she and Bill struggled with how she would act in the role of First Lady. She writes in her autobiography, “We were both grappling with what my role should be. I would have a ‘position’ but not a real ‘job’. How could I use this platform to help my husband and serve my country without losing my own voice”? (Clinton, 2003: 119).

In this section of her autobiography, Hillary eloquently describes the struggles that all First Ladies face, especially powerful independent ones like herself. Her biography, like all her public actions, is censored in a way that can satisfy American social and gender norms. Hillary was forced to convince the country in her autobiography that first and foremost, “she wanted to use her platform to help her husband and serve her country” (Clinton, 2003: 119), and then secondarily she worried about losing her voice. This is a soft way of phrasing the question at hand that feminists, Americans, and First Ladies continue to struggle with: how can a First Lady use her role powerfully to help increase women’s rights and feminism in America? In her next paragraph she describes the expected role of a First Lady: “to represent an ideal—and largely mythical—concept of American womanhood” (Clinton, 2003: 119), which shows that she believes this expectation needs to be reformed. She took small steps in the right direction for First Ladies as an active participant in White House politics. However, even Hillary found it almost

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impossible for a First Lady to take on a powerful position in the White House without receiving criticisms.

Hillary and Bill struggled to reconcile the traditional role of the First Lady as a figurehead with Hillary's intelligence and qualifications as a policy maker. Hillary wanted a largely productive and important role in the White House but wanted to be careful not to receive criticism. The first step in forming a position for Hillary was to designate a staff for her. Hillary was given a large and loyal staff. Although most First Ladies have staffs she had a larger one to help with her ambitious plans in the White House. Her staff quickly became renamed "Hillary land" and was a close and powerful group in the White House (Clinton, 2003).

In the White House, Hillary had little interest in the traditional roles of the First Lady, such as planning parties and decorating. However, despite hesitation, she soon felt the pressure to take on the traditional First Lady role and began organizing social events. Even though she did take on the traditional roles ascribed to the First Lady, it was not her passion. As First Lady she is most remembered for her involvement in policy and especially her controversial healthcare plan rather than the traditional responsibilities of the First Lady.

Healthcare was one of the Clinton administration's first priorities. Healthcare reform was something at the top of the administration's agenda within the first 100 days. For healthcare, Bill looked to his closest and most reliable allies, Hillary and Ira Magaziner. Ira was his domestic policy adviser and an old family friend from Arkansas. He worked both in the private and public sectors and was considered an asset to the healthcare plan. Bill assigned Hillary because he trusted her more than

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anyone and considered her one of the smartest people he knew. In January of 1993, healthcare reform was considered necessary and many people were eager for the Clintons to create a solution. However, advisors cautioned the administration saying that the 100 day plan was too unrealistic, and it would take years to create healthcare reform that would pass through congress. Nevertheless, Hillary had been passionate for years about healthcare and felt that the number of uninsured people in America was a reason for urgency. Even amongst democrats, there were many different opinions on how to solve the healthcare problem. Although several people were onboard with Hillary, creating a plan that would please the majority was near impossible. In the end, the Clinton's plan has been scrutinized and remembered as a failure for Hillary Clinton and the Clinton administration. Both the Clintons learned from the experience and her second term as First Lady was much different and more traditional than her first (Clinton, 2003).

Although perhaps not a success, Hillary's involvement in healthcare reform was a step in the right direction for the First Lady. There are many interesting results from her experience. First, in February of 1993 the administration was sued because of Hillary's role in healthcare reform. Because she was not an employee (First Ladies cannot receive salary) it was technically illegal for her to chair or attend closed task force meetings. This was a setback for the administration and especially healthcare. It also calls into question the First Lady's power in the White House as it relates to feminism. First Ladies cannot legally be paid for their role in the White House, yet if they continue their own careers they are harshly criticized by the public to the point that their husbands can be unelectable as evidenced by

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Howard Dean's failed 2000 primary campaign. This scenario highlights the contradicting role of the First Lady by showing that working outside the White House is not an option and they are technically not allowed to work within the White House either. Ultimately proving that they are trapped by their roles as First Ladies (Clinton, 2003).

Many remember healthcare as a failure for the administration, and especially for Hillary, and therefore it was something she was forced to defend on her Presidential campaign trail in 2008. However, some people realize and credit her for her positive role in the plan. Jonathan Cohn writes in *Hillary was Right: The Health Care Plan That Dare not Speak its Name*, that "an early poll in the *Los Angeles Times* showed: after listening to the President explain the plan in his speech, Americans said they supported it by a two to one margin." (2007) Furthermore, there was bipartisan praise for Hillary's work, "When Hillary toured Capitol Hill to promote the program, even some Republicans gushed over her handiwork—not to mention her obvious mastery of the subject" (Cohn, 2007). However, support for her healthcare plan did not last.

Unfortunately, even though there was support for the healthcare program in the beginning and some throughout, the attackers were stronger, louder, and more effective than the supporters of "Hillarycare." Cohn's article points out the aftermath of the strong rejection of "Hillarycare," is that so many Americans still do not have healthcare. In his article he states that Americans still face so many of the healthcare problems they had before, suggesting that it was quite possible that Hillary could have been right. He goes on to point out how today's healthcare reformers continue

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to look at Hillary's original plan to help restructure healthcare in America. So was it fair that Hillary took so much blame and criticism for her role in healthcare reform, which although was not successful actually had many valid points? The fact that her plan had many valuable qualities and was still highly criticized by conservatives suggests that she was scrutinized more for straying from the traditional role of First Lady than for her policy. Americans who wished for family values and normative gender roles in the White House, used Hillary's failure in healthcare as a way to force her to change her role in the White House. Consequently, Hillary began to play the role of a traditional First Lady.

Another downside of the Clintons' proposed healthcare bill was that it took 14 million dollars to draft (Austin American Statesman, 1995). This huge cost to the administration put Washington further into debt and the White House had to seriously consider welfare reform to help the nation's deficit. The Republicans proposed a controversial welfare bill that had the potential to put 1.2 million more children into poverty. Not surprisingly, this plan was not popular with Democrats. However, Clinton ultimately signed the bill (Austin American Statesman, 1995). Although Hillary did not have direct involvement or leadership in welfare reform at first, she ultimately did seek some leadership in the process. However, she did not play an official role in the reform because of her previous failed healthcare plan. Due to Hillary's liberal leanings, Republicans did not support her involvement. Her husband was much more sympathetic towards their political agenda ("Hillary Clinton Seeks Welfare Role 1996). Bill remained the one mostly responsible, and although he too was hesitant about the reform, after long debate, Clinton finally

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signed on to the GOP's welfare reform plan at the end of his first term. Bill's main reason for signing it was because he saw welfare as becoming a way of life in the District of Columbia, which he cited as the main source of the government's bankruptcy. (Human Events, 1996).

Despite Bill's major popularity amongst Democrats, he received extreme criticism from his liberal supporters for signing this bill. Furthermore, because welfare reform affects so many struggling single mothers and poor women, women's groups were up in arms over the passage of the bill. An article published at the time reported that, "the National Organization for Women even protested in front of the White House during last week's signing ceremony" (Human Events, 1996). Hillary and Bill were considered partners and therefore Hillary was associated with this action that hurt many women. Although her failed attempt at healthcare reform would have helped many women, the welfare reform that Bill Clinton signed onto in 1996, did the opposite. Because Hillary was associated with the welfare reform many people assumed she no longer played the role of a feminist First Lady. However, Hillary just like many feminists was not satisfied with the state of healthcare and welfare during her husband's first term. Going into the second term, as Hillary was changing her image, she hoped that the administration would continue to take steps towards healthcare reform and a more liberal welfare reform.

During her first term in the White House Hillary experienced difficulties with the conflicting role of First Lady. Going into the new administration, she was a very polarizing figure, "I think the country is about 50-50 split. For every Hillary Clinton basher, there's a Hillary Clinton supporter" (Skiba, 1996) said Ruth B. Mandel,

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director of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University. Some people loved the way she redefined the role of First Lady and others felt that her role “was way too much of a break from tradition” (Skiba, 1996). During the second term, the Clintons were cautious to give Hillary as much responsibility and they went into the White House “with ‘more discreet initiatives as opposed to massive reforms...with a more incremental approach to change” (Skiba, 1996). For this term her priorities in the White House were going to shift from more polarizing issues like healthcare reform to more bi-partisan issues. For example, “ensuring children had affordable health care, improving adoption and foster care, and helping the President with education and welfare reform” (Skiba, 1996). Although she had plans to step back slightly from her previous position, she was still going to be involved and be a symbol for women everywhere as an activist First Lady.

Because Hillary was such a polarizing First Lady, the attacks of the right went so far as a huge criminal investigation—Whitewater—an investigation that involved a perceived “cover up” suicide and suspicious real-estate investments in Arkansas. Jim Leach, a Republican representative from Iowa released documents related to the investigation of Madison Guaranty Savings and Loan, the failed Arkansas institution owned by James B. McDougal and Whitewater Development Company. The documents showed that Hillary and Bill were investors in the failed real-estate venture (“The Whitewater Inquiry”, 1994). *The Baltimore Sun* reported in February 1996 that in fact, contrary to the Clinton’s alleged profit in their real-estate flop, they lost \$47,000. So they questioned why the investigation was still happening and costing taxpayers upwards of \$1 million a month on top of the prosecutor fees of

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\$23 million. Nonetheless, the Republicans, specifically special prosecutor Kenneth W. Starr, dragged the process out and it was a never-ending issue for the Clintons. The Republicans leached on to any suspicious information about the Clintons and this was the perfect opportunity to try and criminalize them. Once this investigation began, magazines, television stations and newspapers all scrambled, tried, and fought to get interviews with both Hillary and Bill Clinton. People were so interested in her involvement and how she handled the Clintons' money. Her situation was unusual. The fact that Hillary was in charge of the Clintons' investments, showed Hillary in a position of power that Americans were not used to women being in and especially not a First Lady. Eventually it was settled and the Clintons were deemed innocent in their real-estate investment in Arkansas, but it definitely was negative attention for the couple and the problems for Hillary would not end there. Shortly after, the November 1994 elections occurred where the Republicans took back the majority. Hillary was of course also given much of the blame for this election. With this negative response from the American people, Hillary Clinton altered her role as First Lady even more (Clinton, 2003).

Despite Hillary's criticism and negative attention from Whitewater, there was an underlying positive symbolic message of power for women. The investigation emphasized how Hillary was in-charge of her family's money. First Lady historian Betty Caroli, sums up the vital take away from the extensive scandal: "Behind this flurry of talk lay an important point. The President's wife was being interrogated about substantive, ethical matters, touching on money and power" (Caroli, 2011: 313). We must look at the Whitewater scandal and the criticism

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Hillary received and see how most of it was because she was threatening America's image of a woman, wife, and overall family values. In the United States that is what we need. We need First Ladies and women in positions of power, leadership, and visibility to threaten these social norms so they no longer exist and aren't promoted by government. The fact that she was originally the family breadwinner, and was the one who invested and handled their money, was a direct threat to the traditional American family. Although the nineties were a time of change because more women were taking on such roles in the household, Hillary's status in the Clinton family was still a radical position for a First Lady. Hillary was a high symbol of American womanhood and because of her status she was able to help redefine and transform American gender roles. Even though the Whitewater scandal was not positive press for the couple, it in fact furthered Hillary's symbol as head of the household, dominant and financially independent, which set a major example for women in America. Sadly, she still did have to change her image and role as First Lady, but what was so interesting about her second term in office is that she realized the role of the First Lady was not one in which she could perform to her fullest potential. Thus, she focused less on her First Lady position and began to focus on her own political career.

The fact that she began focusing more on her own political career, was not to say she didn't continue to act as the First Lady of the United States. She simply transformed her role into one more traditional and less controversial. She focused on children's issues, social events, writing books, and columns rather than her previous polarizing partisan role. Furthermore, she continued her travels, making

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one of her most important and praised speeches in Beijing in September, 1995. In 1995 the World Conference on Women was held in Beijing; people were upset she was even traveling to Beijing at a time when they had so few human rights. She was encouraged to keep quiet and stay at home but she did not listen. She went to Beijing and spoke because she felt it was imperative that she do so, saying, "to me it was important to express how I felt" (Stout and Brauchli, 1995). She ignored people's advice showing that, "The speech she gave at the conference was anything but quiet. It included a rousing reaffirmation of women's lives and their claim to respect, while also taking China's leadership to task for suppressing human rights and permitting girls to be less valued than boys" (Caroli, 2011: 314). Although the Chinese government in the audience did not seem to pay attention, every woman was touched and moved by her speech, "China's leadership gave no indication they even heard her, and the nation's newspapers largely ignored her protest, but women in the audience were jubilant" (Caroli, 2011: 314). One Tibetan woman responded that "It was as good as I could have imagined. I was very encouraged" (Caroli, 2011: 314). During a time when Hillary was taking a step back from her role as First Lady, she was also able to use her title, education, and speaking skills to impact the world in a large way with this speech. It was a moment of huge recognition and many applauses for Hillary and a turning point when she became more globally popular.

It is also important and interesting to look at the speech Hillary made at the Women's Conference in Beijing in 1995, and how it helped women. Her whole speech highlighted not just her work to help women in general but also the

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initiatives that need to progress across the world. It was inspiring, thoughtful, and globally relatable. It made the issue of women rights not a Chinese one and not an American one, but a global initiative to promote women rights and feminism across the world. She pointed out that women everywhere are not credited for the work they do and their importance in society. Her speech highlighted how important human rights for both women and men are and concluded that they promote a successful society. Without naming China specifically, she was clearly speaking of their policies. Once she brought up human rights at this conference it was clear that she had the support of the audience because she received huge applauds. She then spoke specifically for women saying there is no reason women's rights should be any different than human rights, and once again received huge applauds. (Hillary Clinton in Beijing, 1995). Overall, many people were touched and impressed with her speech, but she of course did have her critics: "Republican Senator Richard Lugar of Indiana called Mrs. Clinton's speech 'a strong and powerful statement' on human rights, but ill sited and certain to further strain the U.S. China Relationship" (Stout and Brauchli, 1995). White House officials stated in Hillary's defense that the strong human rights message was part of the script. In fact, they felt it would be inappropriate for the First Lady to speak in China without mentioning human rights. "Her most pointed remarks sought to quiet critics who felt she shouldn't participate in the conference because of China's human-rights record and its refusal to allow some groups to attend a grass-roots forum running in tandem with the Fourth World Conference on Women" (Stout and Brauchli, 1995). Overall though, the

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speech was definitely a high point for Clinton and gained her international respect and support.

The success of the Beijing speech did not distract the right wing and Hillary haters for long; soon she would once again be brought back into the Whitewater conspiracy and then the most personal and upsetting downturn for her and her husband, the Monica Lewinsky affair. The affair was distracting and humiliating for Hillary. This is a topic she continues to dodge in interviews and that has little importance and relevance to her role as First Lady and her own political endeavors. However, she had a huge personal decision to make: whether or not to stay with her husband. Her decision to stay with him was criticized not only by her typical critics but also by feminists, "many Americans expressed dismay that anyone with her considerable resources would remain married to a man that exposed her to such humiliation...supporters worried that she had been reduced to the role of the 'loyal wife'" (Caroli, 2011: 316). For a woman that could do, and did do, so well on her own, she did not set the best example for female power and independence as she stood by her husband. During this time, Hillary, the otherwise seemingly exemplary female leader, did not demonstrate feminist values. Ironically though, her popularity ratings rose dramatically; they were the highest they had been since they moved into the White House (Caroli, 2011: 316).

Unlike Whitewater, the process of her husband's impeachment and the Monica Lewinsky affair did not help her as a role model; her reaction was private and many American's could accept that and ultimately felt sorry for her.

Interestingly, in 1998, one of Sulfaro's polls on Hillary and Laura shows an

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unusually low amount of respondents categorizing Hillary as cold, and an abnormally high amount of respondents viewed Hillary in the warmest category. Sulfaro notes, "this was the period during which Bill Clinton was under investigation with Monica Lewinsky, Hillary Clinton's defense of her husband may have elicited an unusually high level of support during this era" (Sulfaro, 2007: 10). How ironic, that Hillary was most likable at a time where she was the most vulnerable, powerless, and played the role of a "traditional" wife, one dominated by her husband. This proves even more the fact that part of the problem with the role of First Lady is society's constraints, judgments, promotion and desire for traditional family roles. The fact that she stayed with her husband is an example of putting family first, over feminist female leadership. Therefore, during this time, Hillary was fitting the desired mold of a traditional First Lady rather than promoting feminist ideals.

Throughout the end of her husband's presidency she kept focused on what she really wanted for herself, her own career and more specifically to become Senator of New York. This independent move set an example for American women that they do not have to be tied down by their husband's career. While her husband was still in office, she conducted listening tours throughout the State of New York. After buying a house in Chappaqua, New York she began to spend less time in Washington, but still had to fulfill her First Lady duties such as hosting state dinners. Chelsea Clinton began to fill in for her mother in the role of First Lady; she even took time off from school at Stanford to help her parents. This shift of Hillary's involvement in the White House shows how powerful she was on her own. She proved her independence by almost fully leaving her First Lady responsibilities

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behind to pursue her own career in politics. The fact that Chelsea had to step in where her mother stepped out is so important. It shows the necessity of a First Lady in the White House today. However, from Hillary's career as First Lady, we see that there are many conflicts between the role and the image of women in America. There are many things Hillary could have done differently in the White House. For example, conforming to the traditional role of First Lady was not as beneficial for women as ignoring society's constraints would have been. Despite her role transformations, the fact that she remained and was overall a strong First Lady set an example for American women. Hillary showed by drifting away from her position as First Lady and focusing on her own career, how the position as it is constrained today by social norms and American idealism, is not helpful for women's rights and feminism. It is more beneficial for capable, strong, and smart First Ladies to use the position as a launching pad for their own independent careers.

Laura Bush's years in the White House serve as an interesting contrast to Hillary's. Laura displayed power, but admittedly focused on helping her husband. After George and Laura were married, she gave up her career and her life was devoted to her husband. Therefore, in the White House she fit the widely accepted American definition of a woman and was consequently way less polarizing and a more popular First Lady than Clinton. Despite Laura's traditional role as First Lady, she despised being associated as traditional and being compared to Barbara Bush and Hillary Clinton. She wished to "shape the job to suit herself" (Caroli, 2011: 325). When asked who was her First Lady role model, Barbara or Hillary, she responded, "I think I'll just be Laura Bush" (Caroli, 2011: 325).

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In efforts to be her own First Lady, she displayed power and strength; within the first days in the White House, Laura made executive decisions. For example, she hated the title First Lady and from the beginning she declared that she was to be called Mrs. Bush or Laura Bush. Although timid at first, Laura overtime got more comfortable with her events. She and George would take trips to schools in poor areas and read to students. They both believed and promoted the No Child Left Behind Policy, a policy that was introduced by George's administration and received overwhelming bi-partisan support. The ultimate goal was to increase school standards by creating measurable goals to therefore improve student results. In order to do this, they required that each state create assessments to be given to each student in order to receive federal funding. Because of the act, federal funding for education increased and the results have been positive. However, many argue that the tests are not a fair judge of students' success and there has been controversy on the subject. Laura, though passionate about education, was highly supportive of the bill and was overall a great advocate for education and better training for teachers (Gerhart , 2004). Furthermore, she displayed her own agenda in the White House, which gave her a degree of independence and power. Her passions, reading and literacy, took first priority on her agenda. She launched a campaign called "Ready to Read, Ready to Learn", which focused on pre-school children and their parents helping them learn to read. Furthermore, she encouraged college students to consider teaching as a career. Another, one of her main goals was to have a National Book Festival based on the one she organized in Texas during her time as First Lady there. The first National Book Festival was held on September 8, 2001. The event

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was successful and one she was passionate about. Because it was a non-controversial cause the event was great publicity for Laura (Caroli, 2011).

After six months in the White House, Laura had the role of First Lady down to a science. She campaigned rigorously, gave speech after speech but still had a very likable, feminine, and compassionate personality (Gerhart, 2004: 126). She realized how much she could accomplish as First Lady and she started taking full advantage of her abilities. She planned the Early Childhood Summit, which was a prestigious event in Washington. Then things changed, one of the most pivotal moments in the Bush administration occurred—9/11. Laura had certainly not prepared for 9/11 but was able to handle even 9/11 with poise and a calmness. The day after 9/11, she visited the Pentagon and the Walter Reed Army Medical Center; she thanked blood donors at the Eisenhower Executive Office Building and she wrote two open letters, one to elementary school students and one to middle and high school students offering them support during this time. This nation-wide tragedy was a time where Laura used her motherly instincts to reassure and comfort the whole country. She was also at her husband's side for support more than ever, squeezing his hand as he got up to speak at the memorial services at the National Cathedral in Washington. Furthermore, she traveled to Pennsylvania and spoke to victims' families comforting them and offering support. "While the President and his aides used the harsh rhetoric of war, the First Lady offered quiet words of empathy and reassurance: 'of course I feel, like everyone does, sadness and anxiety. I also feel, I know, everything is being done to make sure America is safe, because I know that I feel reassured'" (Gerhart, 2004: 166). The motherly role and supporter role that Laura played

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during 9/11 was strikingly feminine. She was not setting any new examples for women and although a well-known public figure, she was not using her leadership to promote the rights of women through policy or through example.

One of the most important, unfavorable, moments of the Bush administration was the War on Terror and especially in terms of the invasion of Iraq. With such a controversial issue, Laura became a helpmate, supporter, and puppet for her husband more than ever. She was specifically used to try and gain support of women and feminists. Laura's role in the administration when war was declared was to speak on behalf of women's rights in Afghanistan. It was something that was appealing to feminists and liberals and was a way to legitimize the war.

Furthermore, with her soft and likeable personality, she was the perfect person for the administration to have advocating women's rights. It was the first time in the administration that she was an ambassador for an issue suggested by strategists (Gerhart 2004 179). During this time period Laura made many solo trips to Europe, and even Afghanistan, to speak on women's rights:

On November 17, 2001 Laura Bush became the first wife to give a President's Saturday morning radio address, which was devoted to condemning what she called the Taliban's war on women and justifying the U.S. War as an effort to free Afghan women. After the overthrow of the Taliban regime, the Bush administration repeatedly invoked women's liberation to justify the war (Ferguson and Marso, 2007: 133).

She became an immediate asset to the Bush administration during this time of war.

She was able to appeal to the women and the more liberal while still having huge approval ratings by the very conservative. However, her influence and use, although a powerful symbol for women, and promoted an appealing and helpful cause for

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international women, was still an example of a First Lady being used to help her husband.

Another example of her speaking about the war on terror and being used strategically by the administration was on International Women's Day. She spoke to the UN and her rhetoric was soft and convincing, making her once again a very important aspect to Bush's presidency and re-election:

The terrorist attacks of September 11 galvanized the international community; many of us have learned valuable lessons from tragedies. People around the world are looking closely at the roles women play in their societies. Afghanistan under the Taliban gave the world a sobering example of a country where women were denied their rights their place in society. Today, the world is helping Afghan women return to the lives they once knew. Women were once important contributors to Afghan society, and they had the right to vote as early as the 1920s...this is a time of rebuilding of unprecedented opportunity thanks to efforts led by the UN and the US and new Afghan government and our ally around the world (Ferguson and Marso, 2007: 199).

During the war and then during the re-election campaign, Laura was used as the main spokeswoman for women's rights. She led the campaign for George and Cheney's re-election *W Stands for Women* effort. Many feminists wonder why she was chosen as the main spokeswoman instead of Condoleeza Rice, but Ferguson in *W Stands for Women* writes:

having Laura Bush as the primary female spokesperson for women's rights may also be a strategic choice on the part of the administration. Whereas Dr. Rice is a single, childless, and ambitious career woman, Bush is a wife and mother who quit her job to raise her children. She has shown no career aspirations at odds with those of her husband. Through her roles as First Lady, acquired by virtue of her marriage to the President, she literally embodies the notion that women's primary identification should be with her family. Consequently, she seems comparatively unthreatening as an advocate for women's rights, since her personal choice to date seems to correspond with relatively traditional gender roles (Ferguson and Marso, 2007: 199).

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This combination is what made Laura such an attractive, non-threatening First Lady. Nonetheless, using Laura as a role model for the ideal woman in America is a setback for women rights, power, and leadership.

The technique of using the First Lady as a tool to justify, explain and emphasize the actions of the President in a feminist light was not first introduced by the Bush administration. Many past First Ladies like Hillary Clinton, Lady Bird Johnson, and Rosalyn Carter used all their abilities to convince the nation that their husbands had America's best interests in mind (Gale Cengage Learning, 2011). Laura's passion and energy dedicated to speaking on issues of women in Afghanistan is an area that is very comparable to that of Hillary Clinton's activist First Lady role. Although some speculate that she was just being a puppet for the administration, her spokeswoman Noelia Rodriguez defends Laura by saying:

Laura Bush is very passionate about this subject. She wanted to be able to use ... the bully pulpit to educate Americans about what is going on in Afghanistan (as cited in Otis, 2001, p. A4). Given her own interests in supporting children's rights (Wertheimer, 2004b), Bush's speeches on Afghanistan provide an understanding of the First Lady as both an "involved, visible helpmate" to her husband and an independent activist with her own agenda (Gutin, 2000, p. 566) (Gale Cengage Learning, 2011).

These articles point out that many First Ladies before Laura Bush played similar helpmate roles in the White House. However, since Laura is a modern First Lady, feminists expected more from her. Considering, the constraints on First Ladies though we should not blame her, but society, for its continuous promotion of outdated, constraining, social norms.

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Ultimately, Laura is viewed favorably and is remembered as a strong First Lady. She was able to be seen positively by people and in areas where her husband was not: "by putting enormous effort into international travel and initiatives that sought to help women and others suffering from malaria and AIDS, she exposed the role of First Lady to an international spotlight" (Caroli, 2011: 334). This allowed her to be judged and seen separately from her not popular husband: "standing by an unpopular President without looking weak or manipulated, she won fans in quarters unfriendly to her husband. All the while, she maintained her image of a caring, intelligent, down to earth person" (Caroli, 2011: 334). Despite the respect she has and the popularity she gained, she could have done more and could have been a stronger symbol for women in America. This was something she realized and when asked if she had any regrets in a *People* magazine interview, she said, "Maybe if I have a regret, it's just that I didn't do more" (Caroli, 2011: 334). Here she is realizing and admitting the power she had as First Lady but didn't act on. This can be seen as hinting at the fact that she could in fact use her power as a stepping stone to her own independent career, which would have been the more beneficial for women's rights.

Comparing the two distinct roles of Hillary Clinton and Laura Bush shows us the striking differences in each administration and gives us overall evidence that the role of First Lady is actually one that confines, controls, and limits women. Meanwhile, it also gives them conflicting power and ability to then pursue careers and movements of their own. The First Lady position is restricted by American society but it is a position that is inevitably important. Hopefully, more and more

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First Ladies will achieve on their own and we can analyze them, admire them and adore them for their independent successes. Because the role of First Lady can open doors for women to enter politics and even run for President, its ability to be a launching pad might outweigh the fact that the role reinforces gender roles, stereotypes, and American family values.

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### CHAPTER 3: The Role of First Lady as a Stepping Stone or Not, to Political Office

Looking back through the years of First Ladies, not many have pursued their own political careers. Eleanor Roosevelt and Hillary Clinton are the two exceptions. Others like Laura Bush and Nancy Reagan continued fighting for the causes they believed in and working with their and other organizations, but Hillary and Eleanor were truly unique in their decision to pursue their own political careers. Although they are distinctive in doing so, many other First Ladies could have used their exposure as public figures to pursue careers of their own. Because of their independent careers and accomplishments, Hillary and Eleanor stand out as exemplary feminist First Ladies. Comparing Hillary's and Laura's distinct roles, lives, and careers after being First Ladies shows the different ways in which First Ladies can choose to use their roles to further their own political careers, and how these decisions can help women across the country.

The roles that Hillary and Eleanor played by having independent, flourishing political careers after their time in the White House are examples of how the role of First Lady can help the women's movement. As a society, we struggle to elect women leaders; in history there have only been 277 women representatives in the United States. Ninety-three are currently serving today—76 in the House and 17 in the Senate (Wasniewski et al, 2012). Although 93 women currently serving seems like a huge improvement, it is still relatively unimpressive considering there are 435 representatives in the House and 100 Senators (Directory of Representatives, 2012). Therefore, First Ladies pursuing their own political careers would be helpful for American women in terms of role models. The position of First Lady can be used

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to show the capabilities of women in politics, help them gain exposure, and ultimately pursue their own political careers. It is vital and helpful to the progression of women political leadership in our country that First Ladies have careers and accomplishments independent of their husbands. The fact that only two First Ladies have done so is sad and discouraging. Laura Bush and Hillary Clinton are very interesting to compare, because Hillary was a polarizing First Lady but was able to be a very successful yet polarizing politician. As discussed in Chapter 2, Laura Bush was the least polarizing of all the First Ladies, and because of her popularity and likability she most likely could have successfully pursued her own political career. As shown through the polls in Sulfaro's study, although not voted the most ideal image of a First Lady, she was liked across parties, and could have used her popularity, name recognition, and experience in the White House to run for office of her own. Laura ignored the opportunity she had after being First Lady and therefore did not set an example for women or help promote women leadership in America.

As discussed earlier, Hillary Clinton began pursuing her own political career before she was even out of the White House. While still First Lady she began traveling New York State conducting listening tours and seeking out the constituents. Although she did not fully declare her senate race, people began to assume that her touring of New York and time spent there was a declaration in itself. For example, after touring upstate near Buffalo in May 1999, before announcing she was running, many Buffalo residents who ran into the First Lady judged her and critiqued her as if she was a running candidate. *The Financial Times*

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from London reported that reviews were mixed—Trish a local barmaid was reported saying, “I like her a lot. I think she’s a real cool lady. It doesn’t bother me that she’s not from New York. I like her a lot more than her husband” (Baker and Thomas Catan, 1999). However, a colleague standing next to her had the opposite extreme opinion, saying, “It stinks. There’s no place for her in New York. She’s not a resident. She should run in her own state. Nobody wants her here. She’ll lose” (Baker and Thomas Catan, 1999). Trish’s colleague could not have been further from the truth. Although juggling being First Lady and running an undeniably tough Senate Race, Hillary was able to win comfortably in her new home state, New York.

The article *Renaissance of a First Lady's dreams; Gerard Baker and Thomas Catan on how Hillary Clinton's flirtation with a Senate Candidacy is going Down in New York* negatively portrays the First Lady and her disconnect with New York State voters. Baker and Catan compared her race, that was officially declared a week later on June 4, 1999, to Robert Kennedy’s Senate race in 1964. However, he predicted she would be less successful, “the 1964 Senate Race is instructive. Robert Kennedy was much less of an outsider to New York than Mrs. Clinton – he had lived on and off in the city since he was three years old. But in spite of a wave of popular sympathy after his brother’s death and an in-built Democratic majority in the state, he was barely able to shake off his image as a carpetbagger and squeaked home by the narrowest of margins” (Baker and Thomas Catan, 1999). This shows that before the race was officially declared, Hillary was already facing negative scrutiny and an uphill battle. Within hours of announcing her candidacy, conservative groups launched attacks on the First Lady. Conservatives for Effective Leadership created a

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whole campaign against the First Lady, creating mass-media advertising and mail campaigns all sending the message that CEL President Gary Nolan articulated on his radio talk show: "Has she ever introduced a piece of legislation, run a business or even served on a local school board? The answer is no. She is only a leader to those liberals that confuse words with action" (Saskatoon, 1999). Advisors close to the First Lady assured that Hillary was ready for a tough fight and would raise the abundant funds to have a competitive Senate race.

As early as the beginning of 1999, when Senator Moynihan decided he would not run again, Democrats began encouraging Hillary to run for Senator of New York. Hillary recalls in her autobiography, "Tom Daschle, the Senate Minority leader whom I greatly respected, called to encourage me. So did many Democrats from New York and around the country. As flattering as the attention was, I felt that other seasoned New York Democrats would be better suited to enter the race" (Clinton, 2003: 495). Despite the motivation of other Democrats, Hillary was dealing with a tough time in the White House—it was the middle of the trial for Bill's impeachment and Hillary wanted to be able to spend the last year in the White House with her family. However, she decided to explore the option after meeting with Harold Ickes, an expert on New York politics. He gave her a very realistic idea of what the race would be like, frankly stating, "I don't even know if you'd be a good candidate, Hillary" (Clinton, 2003: 497), but helped her investigate the idea by giving her a list of 100 contacts to connect with. From then, Hillary began meeting with all 100 contacts. She did her homework, perhaps more than anyone before, taking dutiful notes, exploring every county, and was really prepared to win the race.

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By December 1999 she declared that she would be serving as a part-time First Lady and would be fully dedicated to running her Senate campaign. She moved fully into the Clinton's new home in Chappaqua, New York and the new chapter of the Clintons life began. Hillary's impressive campaign did not come without tricky juggling of her part-time First Lady position: "Mrs. Clinton's decision to leave the trappings of the White House for the campaign trail signals the seriousness with which the First Lady is taking her Senate race. But the arrangement, in which Bill Clinton will live the final year of his presidency in a largely First Lady-less White House, will require a tricky juggling act by Mrs. Clinton and is so unorthodox that even administration aides have few answers about how it will work" (Baer, 1999). Hillary's decision to be a part-time First Lady left many questions to how the administration would function. Nineteen-year-old Chelsea sometimes would help out with social events in the White House when her mom was not home, but for the most part, Hillary's decision to move on from the White House proved how the role of First Lady does not have to trap and constrain Presidential wives. Hillary writes in her autobiography of the struggle she faced: "Balancing the requirements of the campaign with my obligations as First Lady presented a unique challenge. Doing two jobs at once tested both the White House staff, who had stuck with me through thick and thin for nearly eight years, and the dedicated team of campaign aides working on the Senate race in New York" (Clinton, 2003: 509). Although Clinton's tricky but successful balancing act showed ways in which the First Lady can avoid her suffocating role, she acknowledges in *Living History* that she still had the demands of First Lady somewhat holding her back: "Occasionally the White House requested

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that I take a trip or do an event based on the President's priorities or my interests as First Lady, causing my campaign advisers to blanch at the thought of my involvement in anything that wasn't related to New York or its issues" (Clinton, 2003: 509). Although Hillary was faced with the tug-of-war between her Senate campaign staff and White House Staff, her dedication and hard work paid off. In her victory speech the night of November 7, 2000 at the Grand Hyatt, she said proudly to the crowded room of supporters, "Sixty-two counties, 16 months, 3 debates, two opponents and six black pantsuits later, because of you, here we are" (Gamerman 2000). Her success while neglecting her role (relatively speaking) as First Lady really proved the capability of First Ladies to be independent and free from their role in the White House. Despite the critics and large opposition, the voters of New York favored the First Lady—Hillary was able to take a huge step off of the platform of First Lady and beat the Republican congressman from Long Island, Lazio, by over ten percent (Gamerman, 2000).

Perhaps the most interesting part of Clinton's sixteen-month campaign for Senate was that she was First Lady for the whole sixteen months, and she was still First Lady when making her acceptance speech at the Grand Hyatt in New York City on November 7, 2000. Furthermore, at the time her husband, who did not speak but beamed with excitement and support standing behind her on the podium, was President (Gamerman, 2000). While they still both were fulfilling their duties as First Lady and President at that moment, the roles had finally switched—Hillary was the one with the power and Bill was the supportive spouse. The fact that Hillary dedicated her last sixteen months as First Lady to an independent endeavor, and a

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very successful one, shows that First Ladies do not necessarily have to be, nor should they be, constrained, confined, and trapped by their duties. At this moment in the packed Grand Hyatt—"supporters crammed into a sweating, rollicking ballroom and roared the chant 'Hillary', her one-word campaign name that spoke to her efforts to seem like any other suburban matron from Westchester County" (Gamerman, 2000)—Hillary proved to the country that the First Lady does not just have to be a helpmate. She can independently succeed.

It is important to consider how her role as First Lady most definitely helped her. Her name recognition in New York was huge; voters looked at her experience in the White House as qualifications for the job and her connections from the position enabled her to fundraise. "Clinton's campaign at times capitalized on her celebrity. There was Brad Pitt sitting next to her at a fund-raiser at the Democratic convention last summer. Actor Ben Affleck, cigarette in hand, joined her in Manhattan. Calling for campaign cash in Hollywood, she stopped for coffee with Cher" (Gamerman, 2000). There is no doubt that her role as First Lady helped her, but as discussed earlier it was also a huge source of criticism and instigated many attacks by key and powerful conservative groups.

The second term in the White House gives the First Lady opportunity to take more risks. Unlike during the first term, First Ladies do not have to worry about their husband's reelection and therefore we see First Ladies generally take more risks in their second term. Yet Hillary did the opposite. Having faced immense criticism during her first term, Hillary was careful during her second and tried to play a more traditional role. Hillary found her more traditional role in the White

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House neither satisfying nor beneficial so she almost entirely neglected her role when she decided to run for Senate. This was a radical decision and she was truly the first First Lady to run for her own political office, especially while serving as First Lady at the time. Although her role as First Lady reverted to a more traditional one during the second term, her way of branching out and taking a risk was running for Senate. If she ran for Senate during her husband's first term or was already Senator before the Presidential campaign, she would have been criticized as a First Lady. Her rejection of the role altogether during the second term was revolutionary and can be considered as Hillary's way of saying she had enough with the constraints of First Lady and could do better on her own. After really dissecting her Senate campaign—although she did still meet her First Lady duties, like traveling to Europe and Little Rock Colorado after the Columbine attacks—it is clear she dedicated her energy and time to her campaign and less to her job as First Lady, making her a true pioneer.

It is baffling to read editorials from 1999 about Hillary's talk of a Senate race because the predictions were so far off. Even in her autobiography, Hillary acknowledges the disconnect between the national press and her campaign as humorous (Clinton, 2003). It makes Hillary's triumph seem that much more important and impressive: personally, for women, and for First Ladies. John H. Fund wrote an editorial for the *Wall Street Journal* published on February 19, 1999, called *The First Lady Would Be a Second-Rate Candidate*. The title alone leaves a pit in feminists' stomachs. "First Lady" and "Second Rate" in the same sentence, and especially when the First Lady referred to is one of the most impressive of all times,

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is discomfoting and infuriating to the average feminist. Ironically, Fund's prediction was far from the truth. As stated, she was almost unstoppable in New York and far from second rate. This editorial along with others like it, even factual articles like the one from the *Baltimore Sun* cited earlier, were biased against the First Lady. This backlash of negative articles and coverage of Hillary shows how the First Lady is not expected nor supported to run for office of her own. However, Hillary proved the conservative critics wrong by winning the New York Senate by over ten percent.

In Hillary's autobiography she summed up why she ultimately ran, which speaks for why all First Ladies should try and use their experiences to run for political office of their own. Hillary writes, "All over the United States and in score of countries, I had spoken out about the importance of women participating in politics and government, seeking elective office and using the power of their own voices to shape public policy and chart their nations' futures. How could I pass up an opportunity to do the same?" (Clinton, 2003: 502). All First Ladies have this advantage that other women do not—publicity, already established policies and experience in politics, and their own role as a public figure—so First Ladies are already positioned to run for office and pursue their independent political careers. Hillary has proved to First Ladies and women across the country that it is possible and beneficial to use the role of First Lady as a launching pad to your own political career. Hillary's role as Senator helped women through example and policy—ultimately opening the door for her own Presidential race, which as she said in her suspension speech, "made 18 million cracks in the glass ceiling" that exists between women and the Oval Office.

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Personally, growing up in the United States and more specifically New York when Hillary Clinton was First Lady, Senator, and running for President, I always admired, loved, and considered her a role model. She gave me hope as a young girl that more women would take on such serious roles in the White House and then pursue their own political careers. Even more importantly, she gave me hope that one day there would be a female President. Furthermore, politics aside she set an example, an example that women can be mothers, career women, leaders or anything they want. From studying her career there is no doubt in my mind that she did not need the First Lady experience to be as successful as she is today—beforehand she was already a prominent lawyer both in Arkansas and in Washington—but it certainly helped Hillary launch her career in a political culture with few women. Despite the criticism that Hillary received while First Lady and during both her Senate and Presidential campaigns, in the end she came out above the conservative and sexist critics and is highly respected and admired throughout the world.

Today, Hillary serves as Secretary of State and has had record-breaking approval ratings (especially in an administration that has had record low approval ratings), reaching high into sixty percent at times. Furthermore, although she will always have her critics, her fans continue to be loud, strong and many. Currently there are rumors that it is time for Hillary to finally have a well deserved retirement, but many people want her to continue and feel that she will not stop her avid career just yet. Bill Keller wrote in an editorial for the *New York Times* on January 8, 2012 that: “Hillary Clinton is 64 years old, with a Calvinist worth ethic, the stamina of an

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Olympian, an E.Q. to match her I.Q., and the political instincts of a Clinton” These qualities, along with her “impressive empathic ability to imagine how the world looks to an ally or adversary,” make her “invaluable in politics or statecraft”(Keller, 2012). Furthermore, he goes on to say how she has listened and learned from her political mistakes, and in addition she has learned how to deal with tough criticism and ignore what she needs to end up on top. He writes:

She was a perfectly plausible President four years ago, and that was before she demonstrated her gifts as a diplomatic snake-charmer. (Never mind Pakistan and Libya, I'm talking about the Obama White House.) She is, says Gallup, the most admired woman in America for the 10<sup>th</sup> year in a row, laps ahead of, in order, Oprah Winfrey, Michelle Obama, Sarah Palin and Condoleezza Rice; her approval rating of 64 percent is the highest of any political figure in the country (Keller, 2012).

It is amazing, how after years of being a controversial First Lady she has clearly left that all behind and has proven what First Ladies and women in general can do here in America. She has become so popular and such a strong symbol for women in America that as Keller hypothesized, “It's too early to hang up the big ambition. And a lot of us would be deeply disappointed in her if she did” (Keller, 2012). Further, he points out how if she stopped when First Lady, we would not have minded nor would we have expected such great things from her, but now we do.

We cannot predict what is next for Hillary—Keller in his editorial shoots down the idea that she will run in place of Obama, but doesn't think it is too far fetched for her to replace Joe Biden: “The proposal to draft her in place of President Obama this year is preposterous. It exaggerates his vulnerability and discounts Hillary's loyalty. But the idea that she should replace Joe Biden as Obama's running

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mate in 2012 is something else” (Keller, 2012). However, both Hillary’s team and the Obama Administration have denied these rumors. No one can deny though, that with Hillary’s popularity, an Obama-Hillary ticket would be a practical shoe-in for Obama come the 2012 race. There are other roles on the horizon too—being appointed as a Supreme Court justice is something that some speculate for the former First Lady. We do not know what is ahead in Hillary’s future, but we do know that she is at an all time high in her career—and she has raised the bar for First Ladies and women in America. Sadly, so far First Ladies have not followed in her footsteps. Laura Bush although popular and non-polarizing was a relative lame duck in the White House and after compared to Clinton.

Although Laura Bush has had four less years than Hillary Clinton to prove herself as an independent, ambitious and capable woman, she has showed no signs of using her publicity as First Lady to help her embark on her own political journey. Despite playing a seemingly dull and lame roll after the White House compared to Hillary, Laura did use her publicity to help promote and fundraise for causes she found important. Some of these causes help women and this creates room for a feminist analysis of Laura. However, Laura’s life after the White House was focused on family, retirement, and relaxation. Nonetheless, nothing can rid a First Lady of their public figure status and Laura Bush has had to make an effort to keep up with the title by promoting causes and her foundation.

As seen in the rise of Hillary’s popularity around the Monica Lewinsky trial, Americans like loyal wives, and Laura Bush is definitely portrayed as a loyal wife both in the White House and during her years after. British journalist Carole

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Cadwalldr has even gone so far to declare Laura as “the most loyal of loyal wives,” going on to say:

her place has always been at her husband's side, smiling gamely at the cameras, her make-up immaculate, not a hair out of place. And although she's widely believed to be considerably more liberal than her husband – she does not believe in repealing America's abortion law, *Roe v. Wade*, and she recounts how she told George not to make an issue of gay marriage – still she feels the need to assert that Iraq is now a ‘far less violent far more peaceful and stable place’ despite all the evidence to the contrary (Cadwalldr, 2010).

Being a loyal wife as Cadwalldr describes, and as we have seen by looking at her time spent in the White House, Laura did not choose to drift away from her role as a supportive First Lady in her second term in the White House as Hillary did. She continued to stay by her husband's side until the end, and even to this day plays the role of a former First Lady, not Laura Bush.

One thing she did do when she got out of the White House was to write a book, *Spoken from the Heart*. In her autobiography she shows how she is more complicated than assumed and explains the questions many Americans ask—“what a woman like Laura is doing with a guy like him” (Cadwalldr, 2012). She does not flat out address the question in the book but there is a sense of doing so throughout. It is interesting to compare the book to Hillary's because Laura barely discusses life after the White House or her plans. She does note, however, that life did not slow down: “At home our pace of life has hardly slowed; after the White House, requests and invitations continue unabated. There are many days when just as during the presidency, nearly every minute is accounted for” (Bush, 2010: 430). Although showing that she is busy, this sounds like a complaint or whine, which seems

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laughable in comparison to Hillary's endeavors after the White House.

The clearly less ambitious and independent Laura did plan to use her visibility and popularity to continue to "pursue many of the causes that were especially dear to me in the White House" (Bush, 2010: 432). Laura states:

I am eager to continue to advocate for women's rights and women's health. Through a special women's initiative, I have begun working on new ways to help the women of Afghanistan and the Middle East and to promote education and literacy for the millions to whom alphabets are a mystery and basic addition a complex puzzle. And through the institute, we will help to promote basic human freedoms for these women and their families (Bush, 2010: 432).

These ambitions cited in her autobiography were great efforts, and especially for women, but what has Laura actually done? Granted, since her book was published only two years have passed, but not much commotion, energy, and advocacy have occurred, and especially compared to that of Hillary's role.

Laura has stayed true to her word by promoting certain causes. In October 2010, Laura visited Pasadena California to raise money to fight HIV. Fighting AIDS in Africa has been a cause that both Laura and her husband have been fighting for since the early days of his administration. Therefore as her role of former First Lady she has made an effort to continue the fight and use her power as a public figure to help fundraise. Within this issue, Laura has received criticism for promoting abstinence education both in the United States and in Africa, but at this fundraiser she made a point to say "abstinence remains a key part of the programs'. But she added that safe sex, condom use and marital fidelity also play a role in stopping HIV" (Charles, 2010). The organization being supported was called Mothers2Mothers and helps to fight the spread of AIDS specifically from mother to child. At the event there

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was an HIV positive South African woman, Noze Samele, who made an emotional and moving personal testimony. She credited Laura for being a huge fundraising help, especially helping to increase donations from America.

Since before Laura met George, she was passionate about education. Therefore it was no surprise that after being First Lady she continued to support and promote education, literacy, and libraries. In November 2011, she addressed the Education Alliance at a packed Clay Center in Charleston, West Virginia and supported her and her husband's belief that every child deserves a quality education. Laura stressed that "accountability is absolutely crucial for education reform. Schools must have higher expectations for the performance of all students and school leaders" (Harris, 2011). The article in *The Charleston Gazette* stressed the Bushes' initiative since they left the White House to influence education policy: "Since leaving the White House, Laura and George W. Bush have pursued education reform through the Bush Institute, an advocacy arm of the George W. Bush Presidential Center to promote policy issues close to the 43<sup>rd</sup> President's heart" (Harris, 2011). Furthermore, the article highlights the leadership role of the former First Lady who serves as the UN Ambassador for the Decade of Literacy. With the institute, the Bushes continued to work as a team, and Laura, unlike Hillary, has not been able to separate herself from the role of First Lady. In all her fundraising and volunteer efforts she is sadly still hardly defined as separate from her husband.

The list of Laura's activities post White House can continue but they are all strikingly different from those of Hillary's. First of all her duty as First Lady is still being fulfilled—she is still known as former First Lady and has not used her past

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title to create a new independent role for herself. Through her fundraising habits and initiatives she has proven herself powerful and concerned about women; for example the two issues just highlighted, AIDS and education reform, help women in America and even across the world. However, as a role model, she has continued to play the role of the submissive and supportive wife and has not impacted the country with an exemplary role of independence and power. Her popularity would have allowed her to do so, but she chose not to take advantage of the launching pad she had after leaving the White House. Unfortunately, because of the little scrutiny that Laura faced while in the White House, she has become an example of the best role model and traditional role of a First Lady. Hopefully, in the future people will realize how successful Hillary ultimately was and model after her as First Lady and not Laura. As First Ladies gain more power and independence the role can become one that helps, not hurts, feminism.

Although Michelle Obama's role as First Lady is not complete, we can look at what she has done so far as a predictor for First Ladies to come. Michelle Obama brought much hope to America as a First Lady. Her husband's administration was refreshing; the country was excited for drastic change from the first African American, picture perfect, family to enter the White House. Michelle like Hillary was the breadwinner of her family: a successful lawyer and hospital administrator. This was exciting for feminists—maybe she like Hillary, would change the role of a First Lady and be the third activist and pioneer First Lady. Disappointingly though she has declared herself “mom in chief” and tried to soften her image by emulating Laura Bush. Before even entering office Michelle was watched and analyzed closely

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and critically by the sexist and racist media and public. After an outpour of criticism after a comment Michelle made—"for the first time in my adult life, I am really proud of my country" (Shipman, 2008)—Laura Bush gave her words of encouragement and supported the First Lady. On the *View*, Michelle acknowledged how touched she was by the former First Ladies actions and "vowed to emulate Laura Bush and be a model First Lady" (Shipman, 2008). It is rather upsetting, that such an accomplished woman, arguably more qualified, as Hillary was, for the Presidency than her husband, feels the need to conform and model herself in the traditional way. Michelle has become an issue First Lady promoting non-controversial issues like her campaign to end childhood obesity in America, just as Laura Bush did. For such a successful and strong woman with so much potential it is rather upsetting to see her be so constrained by society and the role of First Lady. We can only hope that in the potential second term she will become more of risk taker and hopefully use her role as a public figure to launch her own political or activist career as Hillary Clinton did.

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CHAPTER 4: The Future: How does the role of First Lady define or reflect American womanhood?

Through exploring Hillary and Laura's roles as First Ladies, we see the constraints, conflict, and the irony of the position. Even in such a modern time the First Lady is still defined and constrained by outdated gender roles. Through research I have found that the role is not concretely defined and is ever changing. It is one that has the potential to help empower women in America but is also one that is used by society to reinforce gender roles. It is often used as a prism through which to promote and enforce traditional, conservative family values. The success of Hillary Clinton as a First Lady even after rejecting the confines of the role leaves us with hope that First Ladies in the future can represent female leadership, independence, and importance in America.

When considering how the First Lady defines and reflects American womanhood, I think back to where my interest in studying these two First Ladies began. It was from my infatuation with Hillary Clinton as a little girl; to me she represented the ideal American Woman: powerful, a mother, smart, and successful. She was able to juggle it all and help girls like me by challenging typical gender roles. When considering Hillary, we see how First Ladies can help define and reflect American womanhood in a changing and powerful way. However, as we look at the role in general it is rather constraining and seemingly one that strips powerful and capable women like Hillary Clinton of their voice, power and full potential. Even women with law degrees and careers of their own are forced to become helpmates to their husbands.

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Due to many factors, First Ladies are more and more visible today and with this visibility comes unavoidable leadership. Michelle Obama is constantly in the news. The articles are mostly positive and usually are discussing her leadership in the *Let's Move* campaign, a campaign to end child obesity in America. Additionally, during the current Republican primaries the potential First Ladies have been heavily campaigning with their husbands. They have been the topic of article after article in most recent news. This recent influx of articles and especially numerous front page ones, shows the importance of a First Lady and potential First Lady during a campaign. Once again, reiterating their power, but at the same time demonstrating their lack of freedom. These articles again and again stress how these women are helpful and vital tools for their husbands showing how, ironically, for these women power is increased while freedom is minimized. As we explore the portrayal of the current spouses of Presidential candidates and Michelle, and compare them to the roles of Hillary and Laura, we will sadly see little change and little progress of the position of First Lady. By analyzing these current First Lady candidates, the current First Lady, and the role in general, we will see how it defines American womanhood. Regretfully, the definition has barely evolved from that of a supporter, helper, and second-class citizen compared to her husband.

Michelle Obama, like Hillary Clinton, has once again a unique opportunity. Like Clinton she is a lawyer, and was independently successful before her husband's entrance into politics. In fact, she disliked and discouraged her husband's desire to enter into politics. As such, she was never the typical political-wife. She was so far from the traditional supportive wife that she would even tell reporters, "if he

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[Barack] loses, it might not be so bad'...rubbing her hands together with mock glee" (Kantor, 2012: 24). The role of First Lady has offered her an opportunity to help women in general and more specifically African American women as she has become arguably the most prominent African American Woman symbol today.

Being the First African American First Lady is an added opportunity but also an added pressure that has constrained Michelle even more: "now perhaps as the most prominent black woman in American, she felt pressure to counter negative stereotypes by telegraphing images of elegance and self confidence" (Schultz, 2012: 3). This role of elegance and glamour often has Michelle compared to First Lady Jackie Kennedy and is also often a source of criticism. Her style and clothes are over-analyzed constantly and in hopes of fighting off stereotypes of black women, "she became America's first fashionista during tough economic times for the country" (Schultz, 2012: 4), which leaves room for hostility and increased scrutiny.

Race is a huge constraint for Michelle. It is an added component to her role and one she has to carefully juggle. To analyze the role of race would be a whole new thesis, but I will briefly talk about the stereotypes Michelle is trying to overcome, and why her role must be analyzed in relation to black women in America, as well as all women in general. Melissa V. Harris-Perry, a professor of Political Science at Tulane University, is an expert on race, gender and politics and has recently written a book titled *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America: For Colored Girls Who've Considered Politics When Being Strong Isn't Enough*. In this book she talks about Michelle's role and specifically how it is constrained by racial stereotypes. She writes, "Because Michelle Obama seemed to fit neatly within the

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American racial framework, she was readily subjected to the distorting images of the crooked room. For example, there were attempts to frame her with the common trope of hyper sexuality" (273). She recalls one time during the general election when Michelle was referred to as Barack's "baby mama" a derogatory word for mother out of wedlock who is often annoying to the father. She writes how, "Their characterization of Michelle Obama was not motivated by political opposition alone: it was rooted in the specific history of shaming black women as sexually immoral" (273). Ironically, when compared to all the players in the 2008 election the Obamas were the least sexually immoral. Hillary Clinton had the burden of her husband's affairs, McCain's abrupt end to his first marriage caused controversy in Washington, and Sarah Palin's daughter had a baby out of wedlock. Furthermore, Michelle's wardrobe and body were constantly a topic in the media. People questioned her decision to wear a sleeveless dress, wondering if she should cover up more, showing how Michelle was further sexualized.

The hyper-sexualized portrayal of Michelle is just one example of the race stereotypes she is faced with and tries to rebut. Harris-Perry writes, "Michelle Obama most forcefully encountered the myths about black women in three areas: conversations about her body, discussions about her role as mother, and speculations about her marriage" (277). These are added constraints that First Lady Michelle has to try and counter. Harris-Perry writes how "Other observers comfortably framed Michelle Obama as an angry Sapphire figure. She earned the label 'angry black woman' at several points during the campaign" (274). To give an example, she talks about Michelle's senior thesis, which explored the social and

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personal difficulties that many African American students experienced at Princeton.

Harris-Perry says,

Her analysis, though unsophisticated, is compelling and steeped in her frustrated effort to gain recognition. It resonates with the struggle we have seen as representative for black women throughout American history. Yet when this paper was made public, many in the media questioned whether Michelle Obama harbored resentments and hatred toward white people, white institutions and America in general (275).

Americans' reaction to Michelle's senior thesis exemplifies the Sapphire stereotype.

The Sapphire stereotype is one that Michelle is sensitive to. She constantly calls out sources for making her seem like an "angry black woman". Because of it "Michelle found it necessary to defuse the dangerous image of the angry black matriarch by consciously embracing a softer image" (288).

Throughout the campaign Michelle made it very clear that she was an equal partner to Barack. Unlike so many of the Republican wives we have seen in this year's primary, Michelle does not gush over every little word of her husband. She supports him but she also speaks teasingly about his flaws. "She talked about how Barack did not pick up his dirty socks, laughed about how their daughters complained about his snoring and was honest about how she sometimes felt abandoned in the early years of child rearing" (Harris-Perry, 286). At first she was not playing to the traditional role of a subordinate supporter, "She explicitly refused to worship her husband solely for political purposes but instead insisted that they were equal partners. 'And Barack is very much human'" (Harris-Perry, 286). The role of an equal that she played on the campaign trail was another place and way in which she was portrayed as a "dominating black matriarch is a riff on the angry

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Sapphire character" (286). Her role began to change after this and her popularity rates rose but some critics worry what her decisions will mean for feminism.

"Something unexpected happened, in the months leading up to the election, Michelle Obama's favorability ratings rose steadily. By the time she appeared with Oprah Winfrey on the cover of *O Magazine* in April 2009, she enjoyed 68 percent approval ratings among whites generally and 78 percent among African American women" (Harris-Perry, 276). This exciting and unexpected shift in Michelle's likability could mean two things: she's an exemplary female leader or like most First Ladies she has conformed to society's desires. Michelle has had to make a conscious effort to keep her popularity rates high while keeping the traditional stereotypes of black women far away. Harris-Perry writes, "I take her wardrobe choices as evidence that Michelle Obama is actively using her role as First Lady to cultivate a particular presentation of femininity that is meant to push back against a number of racialized gender stereotypes" (280).

Additionally, another stereotype Michelle has had to battle to contrast is the stereotype of the typical black mother. Harris-Perry describes in her book the stereotypes and history of black motherhood. A traditional stereotype is the Mammy, which has allowed for black pregnancies to often become a source of public shame. Motherhood is a vexed issue for black women because of its sad history. During slavery black women "did not birth children they produced merchandisable unites of labor" (282). Throughout the years of slavery black mothers were not able to mother their own children and they gave birth for the reason to produce labor for whites. Furthermore, today, in modern America, black mothers are often defined as

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welfare queens who have more children to get bigger welfare checks and thus black motherhood is often been associated with the economic decline in the 1990s. "This long tradition of pathologizing black motherhood is the backdrop against which Michelle Obama announced that she planned to serve as mom-in-chief. Many progressive feminists, who had hoped for a more aggressive policy agenda, were distressed with her assertion of motherhood as her primary role" (283). Because of the history of black motherhood, the fact that Michelle chose to embrace her public image as a mother is radical for black women, even though it may just be seen as 'traditional' for white women. Harris-Perry writes, "I see it differently. Michelle Obama is surprisingly thwarting expectations of black women's role in the family and representing a different image of black women than we are used to encountering in this country" (283). This shows how Michelle Obama has to battle with two conflicting roles; the progression of feminism for all women and the eradication of the stereotypes for black women. In this case she has done a good job providing an image of an African American woman who challenges stereotypes but for progression of women leadership it is not the same. "As Mom-in-Chief Michelle Obama, she subverts a deep, powerful, and odd public discourse on black women as bad mothers." (Harris-Perry, 283-284) Moreover, because "black single motherhood is blamed for social ills ranging from crime to drugs to urban disorder. Michelle Obama is an important corrective to this distorted view" (Harris-Perry, 284). However, for promoting women as more than mothers or "Moms-in-Chiefs" Michelle could do more.

Harris-Perry even admits that although Michelle's leadership and role has

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helped to counter stereotypes her approach is also dangerous. "It would be easy to use Michelle Obama's choice, a choice fostered by a unique circumstance of privilege, to reassert that black women who labor for pay outside the home are inadequate parents" (285). Her current situation is so different from many black women in America that her portrayed ease as a mother could be seen as insensitive to the average working mother. Harris-Perry writes, "Given the pervasive myths of black women as bad mothers, this narrative could easily be deployed in undercut support for public policies focused on creation of a just and equal political and economic structure and to focus instead on "marriage" and "family values" as solutions to structural barriers facing black communities" (285). In general the role of First Lady does this. By conforming to the traditional role as mother, Michelle has especially promoted American family values and gender roles and specifically for black women.

Although Michelle is a great asset to rid America of its stereotypes of black women, Harris-Perry Writes:

Many reporters and scholars expressed anxiety about the ascendance of this kinder, gentler Michelle. They worried that she was being packaged in a way that thwarts her authenticity and undermines efforts of feminists committed to the notion of women as equal in their marriages. Although this worry is not groundless, it is important to remember that as an African American woman, Michelle Obama is constrained by different stereotypes from those that inhibit white women (Harris Perry, 2011: 289)

Critics of First Lady Michelle have to remember that Michelle has different constraints than other First Ladies, which has forced her to be more cautious and restricted in the White House. The Obamas have shown, that there is definitely

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progression for black men in America and in the White House but not as much for black women. Ultimately, as Michelle shows, leadership for black women is progressing at the slowest pace. Therefore, Michelle's steps have to be more thought out and smaller, but at least as symbol she is a step in the right direction for America and especially helpful for black women. Considering she is the first among First Ladies to be black, she must be careful to maintain her image. Yet, she is a symbol of progress and as such, she represents that there is still much more progress needed for black women in America. Moreover, she is a symbol that defies the stereotypes of black women in America.

Michelle is powerful and struggles because if she is portrayed negatively, as many powerful First Ladies have been, it won't only be bad personally but also would have an effect on all African American women. She has more conflict to juggle and balance than most First Ladies. Before campaigning for her husband in 2008, Michelle wanted to make sure her image was one that would not be criticized, "As the general election began in June 2008, she refused to campaign until her image problems were under control, "I'm not going to go out there if the consensus is that it's a net negative" (Kantor, 2012: 31). Michelle admittedly was not too eager for the campaign anyway; she hated Washington and did not want the campaign and presidency to interfere with her life in Chicago. However, she realized she loved her husband's genuine desire to change America for the better and believed in him. Thus, she agreed to support his run for the presidency and wanted to find the way in which she could best help him. The campaign strategists worked hard trying to shape Michelle Obama into a largely positive symbol for women and specifically

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African American women in the United States. It “was the beginning of the new Michelle, carefully edited for public consumption” (Kantor, 2012; 31). The campaign strived to have Michelle symbolize “a much more traditional woman’s role” in hopes she would be a symbol similar to “the mom on the Cosby show” (Kantor, 2012; 31). It is interesting that when the campaign looked for a black, female, role model for Michelle to imitate, the mother on the Cosby show was their first thought, showing that “There were so few models of warm, accomplished black mothers that the campaign had to turn to a two-decades-old fictional one” (Kantor, 2012; 31). Although Michelle and the campaign had the intentions of using Michelle as a positive role model for black women in America, her overall role and representation was not one that was a good symbol for feminist leadership. Michelle consciously created a role for herself on the campaign and in the White House that satisfies social gender norms and family values.

*New York Times* Correspondent, Jodi Kantor has been following the Obamas since the beginning of his campaign and she has been able to observe the true interactions of the couple and learn their dynamics. In her recent book *The Obamas* Kantor writes of Michelle’s hesitation, struggles, and unhappiness with the role of First Lady, Washington, and American politics in general. She has the ability to captivate the reader through interesting detail and a story-like style. Connie Schultz, another *New York Times* Correspondent notes in her review that with Kantor’s extensive coverage of the Obamas during the 2008 campaign and experience as a current Washington Correspondent she “has earned the voice of authority”, describing Kantor as “A meticulous reporter, [who is] attuned to the nuance of small

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gestures, the import of unspoken truths. She knows that every strong marriage, including the one now in the White House, has its complexities and its disappointments" (Schultz, 2012: 2). Furthermore, noting Kantor's "high regard" for women and her therefore important and rare inclusion of Michelle Obama in detail. This makes the book both interesting and very helpful when comparing her to Laura and Hillary.

Michelle Obama offered hope, excitement, and potential to the feminists who wanted to see a strong passionate First Lady who could help re-define womanhood in America. However, sadly, Michelle because of race has faced more constraints than the First Ladies to come before her. Kantor offers detail and insight into the Obamas' life and partnership in the White House and she also has a great understanding of the difficulty of the role in general. She sums up in her book *The Obamas*, "to be First Lady meant enduring scrutiny and confinement; watching your husband make excruciating decisions and then be attacked for them and advising in secret, rarely acknowledging your influence" (84). She then points out that those First Ladies who have been openly influential like Nancy Reagan and Hillary Clinton, "were deemed meddlers, unelected figures who held unearned power" (84). The role is one that is almost impossible to take on without huge battle wounds, Kantor sums up the irony of the role saying, "That was the contradiction of the job: Presidents made it to the White House in no small part because of their hardworking, canny wives, but once they arrived, the women were exiled to the East Wing and recast solely as helpmates" (84). Having been able to observe the criticisms of past influential First Ladies like Reagan and Clinton, Michelle was

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careful to not be portrayed as such. The Obama staff also was cautious of her every move and this included every outfit, as they were hyper sensitized to how she would be received. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier Michelle had the huge added pressure of race: "She was also acutely aware that she and her family were the country's, and the world's most important African American role models. Changing stereotypes was part of why the Obamas had run in the first place" (Kantor, 2012: 85). For this reason, Michelle has been concerned and aware of her image and the White House image overall in hopes to help rid the country of its racial stereotypes.

With this goal, Michelle has focused a lot of her attention on style and fashion. This subject is typically feminine and because of this focus and her non-controversial, children related causes, many feminists consider her a mostly traditional First Lady. Once we understand the racial stereotypes she faces though, she can be considered less traditional. However, she is over qualified and her role as a non-decision maker or policy maker in the White House has caused both her and the average feminist social frustration. First of all, she had to change her fashion and style focus because everything and anything she wore was scrutinized. Kantor writes, "She was tired of being known for what she wore and though she still dressed glamorously, she pointedly refused all fashion-related requests and invitations" (2012: 136). She struggled with finding the proper role in the White House that would meet society's restrictions and make her happy.

After reading Kantor's descriptions of the dynamics between the couple in the White House it becomes clear that Michelle, although her own person, plays the role of a Laura-like First Lady but has the ability to be a Hillary-like First Lady.

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Throughout their relationship the Obamas have had separate work lives and careers; Michelle avoided being involved in much of Barack's political life as Senator. Instead, she spent her time independently running Chicago University's Hospital. In the White House, though it was unavoidable that being the First Lady would become her full time job, she struggled with the contradicting role. Although she was smart, a lawyer and qualified to help Barack in the White House, as Hillary Clinton did, she and Barack had a very different dynamic. The couple was not used to working together and the First Lady and her staff has been kept very separate from the West Wing. Kantor writes, "It wasn't clear how seriously Obama took his wife's opinions about strategy or message. He was charmed by her concern, advisers said but she wasn't fluent in those matters; she tended to over worry about what she saw on television" (2012: 75). This dynamic is one that is very different from the "vote for Bill is a vote for Hillary" motto of their campaign. They were clear political partners and Bill took Hillary's opinions very seriously. Michelle is facing the awkwardness of her position, she is not a paid official but she has no freedom to continue her normal typical life. She found herself very dissatisfied and frustrated, wondering why the White House wasn't using her: "she was a strong asset, she felt; she wanted to help the male advisers at the other end of the building, she just didn't see it. 'She wanted to be part of the strategy, she wanted to make sure everything was coordinated' said Anita Dunn, the White House communications director at the time and one of the few advisers close to both the President and the First Lady" (Kantor, 2012: 79).

What Michelle wanted to be most involved in was Obama's healthcare plan.

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Like Hillary Clinton healthcare was an area that she was very passionate about and experienced in. She felt that she could use her years working at the University of Chicago's Medical Center to help with planning and policy. However, advisors were concerned about having Michelle involved in any policy. She assured them, "I don't want to be Hillary Clinton, I can't be that person" (Kantor, 2012: 114). When she said this she was referring to the harsh criticism that First Lady Clinton received. Because of the pressure of race, Michelle felt she could not risk being criticized like former First Lady Clinton was. Despite hesitation from the administration Michelle knew that she could be used to help gain support for Obama's healthcare proposal. She told the staff, "Figure out how to use me effectively. I am going to tell my team this is my priority" (Kantor, 2012: 114). Still though, Obama's top advisors were careful to get her involved in healthcare because the scars from Hillary's involvement were not yet healed. They used Michelle to speak to groups and connect on an emotional level about healthcare. She certainly became an asset in helping the administration, but she was still frustrated with the hesitation the administration gave her. "When the First Lady heard the cautions, she often felt criticized and underappreciated, they said. All she wanted was to be an asset to the administration, and instead she was being treated as a potential liability" (Kantor, 2012: 88). From her fashion, her causes, and policy opinions everything Michelle does is highly censored. She is faced with added pressure because of her race that makes her more trapped and constrained in maintaining an image than both Hillary and Laura were.

Michelle's unhappiness and struggle in the White House is not uncommon

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amongst First Ladies. As we saw from analyzing Hillary and Laura, Hillary found the job so confining that she ended up rejecting the role altogether to pursue political ambitions of her own. Laura, although seemingly happy was clearly constrained and confined by the role and even "admitted to melancholy and frustration, writing in her memoir of lonely afternoons spent reading in the empty grandeur of the residence and feeling underestimated and misunderstood" (Kantor, 2012: 84). These struggles show how confining, conflicting and ultimately more harmful than helpful for feminism the role is.

Overall, Kantor's book *The Obamas* has received favorable reviews by most except for the main subject herself, Michelle. *New York Times* article *The CAUCUS; First Lady Brushes Aside Book's Account of Friction* states, "Michelle Obama dismissed a new book's portrayal of her role as a First Lady, saying it played off an image of her as 'some angry black woman' and insisting that she had played little role, at least directly, in the West Wing of the White House" (Cushman, 2012:1). Furthermore, she defends her role in the White House saying that she doesn't have conversation with Obama's staff nor does she go to meetings. She also does admit though as the book said she is one of Obama's biggest confidants and of course influences him: "I am one of his biggest confidants. But he has dozens of really smart people who surround him. That's not to say that we don't have discussions and conversations. That's not to say that my husband doesn't know how I feel" (Cushman, 2012: 2). Finally, Michelle denies the unhappy portrayal of her as First Lady by Kantor saying:

I love this job. It has been a privilege from Day 1. Now there are

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challenges, with being a mother, and trying to keep your kids sane, and I worry a lot about that. I mean, if there is any anxiety that I feel it's because I want to be sure that my girls come out of this on the other end whole. But me, Barack, we're grown-ups, you know; all the ups and downs, you know we take it on. (Cushman, 2012: 2)

Michelle's strong reaction trying to defend her unhappiness, struggles, and anger are not surprising. As the general election nears First Ladies are hot topics being analyzed and used constantly on the campaign trail. Michelle too has increased her visibility and activeness and therefore it is no surprise that she is defending her role as a First Lady. From this article it is clear that Michelle and the Obama administration want the First Lady to be separate from policy and it is clear they are very concerned with her being portrayed as an "angry black woman." Ironically though after analyzing the roles of Hillary, Laura, and Michelle as First Ladies, seeing their struggles, constraints and the sexism that exists, don't First Ladies, black and white have a right to be angry?

With the rise in the 2012 Presidential election the First Lady has become more and more visible. The potential First Wives running with the Republicans have also been receiving endless attention from the media. Article after article and campaign appearance after campaign appearance Callista Gingrich and Ann Romney have been making a strong presence. As their husbands fight a tough and long race to the nomination, the potential First Ladies have been used as political puppets and helpmates. All the attention has distracted the country from the Obamas and Michelle has been making a conscious effort to increase her visibility. Her "Let's Move" campaign has been very active and she has won herself front-page articles about her efforts. The advisers have gone from not knowing how and where to fit

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Michelle into the administration to learning exactly how helpful she can be on the campaign and Michelle like all First Ladies has been transformed by the administration into a political puppet.

Michelle spent almost a year in the White House before she officially decided where to focus her energies. In the fall of 2009 she launched her "Let's Move" campaign to help end obesity. She was very aware that the campaign could seem like a typical First Lady initiative and she and her aides wanted to make sure it was different: "she wanted real change—to take on a seemingly intractable public health crisis, attack it hard, and win." (Kantor, 2012: 138). Her staff worked hard researching and accumulating information on the topic, which took longer than expected and the program was not officially launched until February 9, 2010 (Learn the Facts, 2012). "The First Lady, with Cutter's help, decided her role would be to unify the existing anti-childhood obesity efforts and add new ones, bringing federal, state, and local government efforts into alignment, working with nonprofits, chefs, and pediatricians, and lobbying the corporations behind supermarket food and restaurant chains." (Kantor, 2012: 139). The campaign allowed Michelle to move away from her previous role in the White House, "a lavish entertainer, subordinate to the West Wing" (Kantor, 2012: 140). This campaign that separated her from her traditional First Lady role has also been very widely accepted by the public. The administration has worked hard to make sure that the campaign is totally separate from policy and it does not get associated with the Obama Healthcare plan. This separation in policy and the bi-partisan acceptance of the cause, has allowed her role with the campaign to be an asset to the administration.

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Recently, Michelle's "Let's Move" efforts have been front and center on the campaign trail. She traveled from New Hampshire to Iowa and on promoting her cause and husband's campaign. Traveling to these key primary states and energetically promoting her campaign has allowed her to take away momentum from the Republicans. A recent article in the *New York Times* highlights the use of Michelle on the campaign trail stating:

Mrs. Obama has managed to make her 'eat your peas' message painless and even occasionally joyful, hamming it up through a three-day, four-state tour to mark the second anniversary of her childhood anti-obesity campaign, 'Let's Move'. The trip is a timely reminder of why the Obama campaign views her as such a potent weapon. (Landler, 2012: 1).

Michelle has transformed from the awkward first black First Lady whose undefined role proved a burden to the campaign to a secret and needed weapon for Obama's re-election. The campaign increased her visibility, she appeared on *Top Chef* judging healthy school lunches, doing push ups on the *Ellen Show*, and in primary states speaking to people about her campaign and husband. Her clear passion for the issue comes out through her hard efforts but she also realizes how it can help her husband saying, "It's an issue that I care about, but it's an issue that's important to the country. And because it's an issue that's important to the country, it helps my husband" (Landler, 2012: 1). Michelle and the campaign realize how she can help, and thus, she has been more and more active in promoting the issue throughout the country.

There are two interesting points to take out of Michelle's experience on the campaign trail and the increase in promoting the "Let's Move" campaign. First of all,

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it is a campaign that she is passionate about and independently started, which gives her power. However, she is also being used as a political puppet to help her husband. Thus, although powerful and impressive, Michelle's campaign cannot be seen as a truly independent and feminist helping cause. It is one that if successful though will help many women, because as previously said, this campaign is universal and would help the nation across parties, races and genders. So, although Michelle should be praised for her great efforts and work, her role is still one more similar to a helpmate of her husband. Interestingly though at the end of the *New York Times* article *Helpings of Energy and cheer for the Trail*, it is noted that Michelle controls how much time she will give to the campaign, which shows more power. "The President's campaign advisers said that they were well aware that Mrs. Obama drew strict limits on how much she would do for the campaign because of family obligations" (Landler, 2012: 3). Michelle told them from the beginning the time she has for the campaign and "whatever you do with that time is up to you, but when it's over, don't even look at me" (Lander, 2012: 3). She was concerned about balancing her agenda to make sure she had time to fulfill her role as a mother. Although this comment is powerful and shows her control over how much she will campaign for her husband, it frustrates me because it further promotes the idealization of American family values. However, when we read this quote in the context of black motherhood, we see how her family role is radical. Nonetheless, the First Lady, not the President, is of course the one concerned about budgeting her time for her children because she is expected to be the caretaker. This in itself is frustrating, infuriating, and reiterating gender family roles. Between campaigning for her

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husband and meeting the needs of motherhood, Michelle Obama has been left with little freedom and independence.

With the rise in technology candidates and spouses are constantly being watched. The rise has made information about both the candidates and spouses more readily available for all. Furthermore, there is an expectation that they will all have fancy websites and stay up to date with all social media. The Obamas were the first to really use these technologies to their benefit and set an example for the campaigns to come this year. Hence, this year we have seen a very active social media campaign of all the Republicans candidates. This rise has also added extra room for opportunities for the potential First Ladies to get involved and be helpful on the campaign trail. This gives potential First Ladies power on the campaign trail and more resources to get involved. Furthermore, it promotes their visibility, which allows them to be symbols of power for women and examples of female leaders. However, it also creates more ways for the campaign to use them and they easily become helpmates.

When looking at the roles of the potential First Ladies on the campaign trail today, and comparing them to those of Laura's and Hillary's there are many similarities. Because of the rise in technology these women are probably even more involved in the campaign than Hillary and Laura were, but for the most part the roles are pretty similar. Exploring the way Ann Romney, Callista Gingrich, and Michelle Obama are being used on the campaign trail will give us insight on the ways in which the role is changing, and how it represents and defines American womanhood today.

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Recently there have been many editorials and articles on the Presidential candidates' spouses. One by Frank Bruni is titled, *Here come the Helpmates*, which is an interesting title because he is declaring that all First Ladies are helpmates to their husband. Although, Bruni had many valid points about First Ladies, his article is frustrating because not all are solely helpmates and he neglects to mention social constraints placed on First Ladies. Nonetheless, he does have an interesting point: we should not consider candidates' spouses when pondering who to vote for. By doing this, potential First Ladies would have the freedom to continue their own careers and would not have to fulfill as Bruni called it, "chores" of the campaign. When concluding his article, Bruni makes an excellent observation, "If we're going to accept spouses as looking glasses, don't President Obama and his predecessor both look like pretty selfish men? Neither Michelle Obama nor Laura Bush wanted a national campaign or the White House. Their husbands asked huge sacrifices of them" (Bruni, 2012: 3). It is true, Bush and Obama do seem pretty selfish. After reading about both Laura's and Michelle's hesitation and unhappiness, we ultimately see the truth in Mrs. Washington's quote, stating that First Ladies' roles were, "more like a state prisoner than anything else" (Clinton, 2003: 119).

Although each Republican candidate has at one point gained momentum, Romney has been the consistent front-runner of the 2012 Republican Primaries. Because of his front-runner status, Ann Romney has also been consistently in the spotlight and used as a political tool for the campaign. She's been able to show the country Mitt's emotional and human-side that does not come across in the campaign; for example, Ann is able to portray a side of Mitt that appeals to voters.

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Muareen Dowd, a *New York Times* Correspondent wrote an article on how Ann was the one who convinced Mitt to run titled, *She Made Me Run!* In this article she writes, "if Ann can go all out to persuade Mitt to run, though she has to endure the rigors of campaigning with multiple sclerosis, then voters may begin to believe there's more to Mittens than a glossy bankroll and glossy hair" (Dowd, 2012: 2). Ann conveyed power by persuading Mitt to run and since then has become a full-time addition to the campaign.

As Romney has faced more and more pressure and opposition, Ann has increasingly served as an asset to the campaign. *New York Times* Correspondent Michael Barbaro wrote an article titled, *Campaign Sends Romney to the Rescue. Ann Romney*, which outlines how when Romney would slowly lose his lead Ann Romney was brought into the picture to help voters understand Romney's true character.

Although Ann convinced Romney to run, she hasn't been known to love the process. She hated the 2008 campaign and still dislikes going to debates, saying in an interview, "listen I don't even want to go to the debates" (Barbaro, 2012: 1). However, Ann has taken on the unavoidable role of being Mitt's "secret weapon". Although she has hesitated getting involved in the campaign and hates the scrutiny and pressure it comes with, this time around she has decided to enjoy the process and all the opportunity it brings.

During the beginning of the primary season in early December, about a month before the nation's first primary in New Hampshire, Ann made four appearances in just one week in Iowa, New Hampshire and Washington. At this point she proved that campaigning was her full-time job. Ann has been the topic of

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news from television, newspaper, and magazines, and the introducer of her husband on almost every primary celebration speech he has given, and is active in her own independent social media to promote her husband. She has a facebook and now even a Pinterest to help gain support for her husband. If Ann is the First Lady though what does that mean for women in America and how will she define the idealized American woman?

Ann Romney has already begun to discuss her role in the White House if she becomes First Lady. For a woman who has never had a career—she married Mitt right out of high school and they immediately started a family—it will be interesting what she decides to do with the job as First Lady. She is clearly capable; we have seen her work tirelessly on her husband's campaign, but her lack of experience is a sure sign she will stay away from policy. She has both acknowledged the challenge of the role and the excitement she has about the opportunity to follow in the footsteps of the First Ladies she has high admiration for, including “three former Republican Presidents' [spouses]: Mamie Eisenhower ('adorable, sweet, grandmotherly'), Barbara Bush ('I adore her; she is outspoken and frank'), and Nancy Reagan ('just how much she loved her husband')” (Barbaro, 2012: 3). Her role model First Ladies and her words used to describe them make me worry. As a female leader and policy maker, she would be a First Lady that would probably bring little, if any, progression to the role. When she articulated her desires for the role she said, “offering a 'steadfast' private support for her husband and of public advocacy for disadvantaged children and those with multiple sclerosis” (Barbaro, 2012: 3). From the sounds of it, she will be a “supporter” and also use her power to

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support a non-partisan cause. Knowing Ann's background, watching her on the campaign, and hearing her wishes for the office, it seems as if she will be the exemplary traditional First Lady. She will promote strong traditional values and gender roles. No wonder she is so popular on the campaign trail.

The other potential First Lady who has been ubiquitous in magazines, newspapers, and television is Callista Gingrich. Her husband had a rise in the polls that put the couple in the spotlight. Furthermore, her husband has an interesting scandalous marriage history, which makes it a subject often spoken about. However, it also makes Callista a woman the campaign is hesitant about drawing attention to, "voters know little about Mrs. Gingrich other than that she is her husband's third, much younger wife – a circumstance that has led to speculation that she remains silent because the campaign does not want to call attention to the marriage" (Gabriel, 2012: 1). Nonetheless, she has recently been used a political puppet by the campaign because they realize she can "soften her husband's sharp edges and perhaps prompt voters to take another look at him" (Gabriel, 2012: 1). Similarly to Ann Romney she is able to convey "humanizing details" about her husband including the library on his Kindle and details about his not so great golf game, she said "he gets in and out of more sand traps than anyone I have ever seen" (Gabriel, 2012: 1).

Callista's role or lack thereof on the campaign has shown signs that she will be a similar First Lady to that of Laura Bush: traditional. However, there are suggestions that she could be powerful. She's a career woman of her own and there is speculation that the only reasons she plays the role of the supportive "silent" wife

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on the campaign trail is because of fears she will draw attention to her husband's three marriages and affairs. Callista is the President of Gingrich Productions, a production company the couple owns. They have produced numerous documentaries on American history and government. Because Callista is a professional, unlike Ann, there could be opportunity for her to keep her independence in the White House. "She is a very disciplined, professional person. She's a classical pianist by training...She's helped make seven documentaries. Just a very talented, competent person. She works very, very hard" (Levy, 2012: 1). Her most recent project has been a children's book, *Ellis the Elephant* about a patriotic elephant who travels through American history (Levy, 2012). Not only is she accomplished career wise; she has a lot of influence in her relationship with Newt. Newt often will credit his wife for helping him find faith and transforming him as a man. "Now Newt promotes himself as a man reborn. According to the latest People magazine, Callista has played Henry Higgins to Newt's Eliza Doolittle, remaking him into a more docile man who plays golf, loves opera, worships at a Catholic church, and, for the first time, shares his calamari" (Dowd, 2012: 2). On the campaign he has been portrayed as totally transformed by his devout Catholic wife. It is clear though that Callista has a lot of power in the relationship, which could also suggest an interesting, more equal dynamic in the White House.

Not surprisingly, Callista's power is not seen positively by many. In fact, her husband's original staff quit because of her control. Gingrich's former strategist recalls, "She's the single most self-centered person I've run into in politics—it's all about her. They do these movies together, and she does a word count: she has to

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have the same number of words on camera as he does or they have to reshoot” (Levy, 2012: 6). This dynamic would offer an interesting power relationship between the couple in the White House. She clearly has a lot of power and is considered an equal to her husband. As we have seen through Hillary's critique it is not surprising that her power and control has been criticized.

Although behind the scenes Callista and her husband have an equal if not Callista dominated relationship, on the campaign trail it is hard to tell. Unlike Ann Romney who has been a key campaign tool, Callista's primary role on the campaign has been standing behind her husband as a supporter, latching on to every-word he says. “Callista watched and smiled and listened, the things she has to do the most these days. On the campaign bus, asked if her mind ever wanders at these events, she replied, ‘No’ with a cheeky smile ‘I hang on to his every word” (Levy, 2012: 12). Furthermore, when Callista is used on the campaign, she rarely speaks for more than five minutes, which also leaves her seemingly powerless and not competent (Gabriel, 2012). Callista has hinted that if she were to be First Lady she would take on a traditional role like Laura Bush. “She told me that if she were First Lady she would focus on promoting music education—precisely the kind of uncontroversial passion that plays well with everyone, like Laura Bush's crusade against illiteracy” (Levy, 2012: 6). From the looks of it, Callista if First Lady would not surprisingly, be a very capable and competent woman trapped by society's constraints of First Lady.

Every Presidential election offers hope. Hope that there will be a new First Lady who is strong, independent and who challenges all the social constraints in the White House. Michelle Obama the first black First Lady, a lawyer herself, and

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competent career woman gave the country excitement and energy for change, especially feminists. However, because of her race she is seemingly the most constrained First Lady of all. So far what we have seen on the campaign trail this primary season, is that the front-runner's spouse Ann Romney seems to offer little progression for women in the White House. Besides her religion (Mormonism), Ann Romney is the perfect symbol of a traditional American woman, which sadly explains why she has been Mitt's "secret weapon" on the campaign trail.

Hillary Clinton symbolized so much for American women and she set an example by running her own Senate campaign instead of fulfilling the roles of First Lady. She proved that you do not have to be a cookie cutter, husband supporter, helpmate First Lady. She opened up doors for women and set an example for First Ladies to come. However, the criticism that came along with Hillary's role has cautioned First Ladies like Michelle Obama. Unfortunately, for this reason, we have not seen a progressive First Lady since Clinton and from the looks of the current Republican campaign we will not be getting one for at least another 4 years.

There is no doubt that the First Lady is a huge public figure and role model for women. As we have seen news article after news article is about either Michelle or the potential Republican First Ladies. They are useful and necessary tools on the campaign trail, which shows their power but also their lack of freedom. For feminists and girls hoping to be leaders they define American womanhood too traditionally. They are symbols to look up to and learn from but also helpmates. The role is so conflicting and confusing but it is one that ultimately hurts feminism in society.

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The fact that the role of First Lady in itself is such a vital role, only further promotes traditional family values. Through my thesis I mean not to criticize First Ladies' hard work or devalue their role, but my hope is to disclose the unfair, sexist, and outdated constraints placed on these women by society. Sadly this forces the role in itself to be one that requires First Ladies to be helpmates to their husbands. Hopefully, as more and more people, especially women, realize the unfair limitations on the role of the First Lady, the role in itself will transform into either that of a paid employee of the White House or an independent and free woman. That choice could be left to them. I am hopeful that in my generation we will see not only a transformation of the role of First Lady but a female President. It is baffling that out of our 44 Presidents zero have been women. This statistic is infuriating to me and until we have a woman in the White House, the White House itself echoes normative gender roles, which only further suppress and constrains American women.

## CONCLUSION

Over the years, First Ladies have been arguably the most prominent symbols of female leadership and womanhood. Sadly though due to social constraints and gender roles, First Ladies have not been exemplary female leaders. After examining two diametrically opposed First Ladies, Laura Bush and Hillary Clinton, I have observed that First Ladies are forced to play the role of helpmates in the White House. I analyzed their roles on campaigns, roles in the White House, and their independent roles after the White House, and I saw that at each stage in the White House the First Lady was constrained, criticized, and stripped of her voice. However, because of the First Lady's role as a public figure she is left with the opportunity to pursue an independent career of her own. Sadly though only two First Ladies, Eleanor Roosevelt and Hillary Clinton, have done so. The role is conflicting; it is one that offers opportunity and power through symbolism but ultimately because of society's norms and expectations traps First Ladies. Finally, I have compared the current First Lady, Michelle Obama, and the current potential Republican First Ladies on the campaign trail to Laura and Hillary. By analyzing them in comparison to Laura and Hillary, I have found that modern America still holds onto traditional and outdated gender roles and norms, thus consequently limiting First Ladies.

In Chapter One I outlined how the roles of First Ladies on campaigns are empowering but simultaneously constraining. Through analyzing Hillary's and Laura's different roles on the campaign, I conclude how vital a First Lady is to helping her husband be elected. Her importance gives her a sense of power, but it

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also confines her. The First Lady is forced to give up her independent life. Laura was used as a puppet throughout the campaign to appeal to more moderate voters who could relate more to her than her conservative husband. Hillary was in the beginning considered an asset for the Democratic primary. She appealed to the liberal voter; many feminists and liberals were excited about what she would bring to the White House. However, during the general election, Hillary was forced to change her image to a softer one. She changed her dress; she ditched her famous headband, and tried to prove her femininity through a cookie-baking contest with Barbara Bush. It is not until potential First Ladies can opt-out of campaigning full-time for their husbands that First Ladies will be in a real position of power.

Through my analysis of Laura's and Hillary's roles in the White House in Chapter Two, I was able to explore the ways in which they helped women and hurt women during their time in the White House. Through both policy and example, First Ladies have an opportunity to help women. First Ladies seemingly have the ability to mold their role in the White House but are really constrained and confined by society's gender roles and expectations. Hillary was a true pioneer in the White House taking on policy like healthcare, but through her involvement she faced vast criticism. This criticism forced Hillary to transform her role in the White House to a more traditional and acceptable one. Meanwhile, Laura was a traditional First Lady from the onset. She was a supporter of her husband and stayed far away from partisan issues. Laura's technique in the White House made her a far less polarizing and a widely accepted First Lady. Contrarily, Hillary was the most polarizing First Lady, but set a great example for women in America.

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The overarching benefit of the First Lady position is the fact that it is an opportunity for a woman to become a widely known public figure. This allows her power to pursue her own political career. I discussed in Chapter Three how the role of First Lady could be a launching pad to her own independent political career. This creates room for First Ladies to be great examples of independent leaders. Through policy and leadership of political careers they have the option and ability to promote women's rights and feminism. Laura although not polarizing and popular has not pursued any such role in her time after the White House. She has continued to fit the idealized role of a woman in America: a wife, mother, supporter of her husband, and an involved fundraiser for charities important to her. Meanwhile, during her last 16 months in the White House, Hillary became a part-time First Lady. She pursued a Senate campaign and despite a tough battle, with determined opponents, she won. She showed that First Ladies do not need to be trapped by the role of First Lady. Since then she has further challenged gender norms by running for President and serving as one of the most popular Secretary of States. Although, she was criticized harshly when in the White House, she has ended up hugely successful and popular in the United States, showing that the outdated gender roles and family values that still exist in the White House can and should be redefined.

Finally, after analyzing the roles of Hillary and Laura as First Ladies, I looked at Michelle Obama and the current Republican candidates' spouses to predict what the future for First Ladies will be. The Obamas have brought an abundance of hope and a desire to change to the White House. However, in regard to the progression of feminism and eradication of gender constraints, the First Family has done little.

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Michelle has stayed far away from policy and has declared her role in the White House that of a 'Mom and Chief'. Because the First Family is the first African American family to be in the White House, they have added pressures and constraints. There are long ingrained racial stereotypes that exist in America. The First Family has pressure to represent the idealized American family, in order to help rid society of these racial stereotypes. Thus, Michelle, a lawyer herself who brought hope to feminists that she would redefine the role of First Lady has ended up being the most constrained First Lady of all. Furthermore, sadly, when looking at the current Republican primaries, we see that the potential future First Ladies have promoted themselves as helpmates to their husbands who would not through example or policy challenge the outdated and sexist gender norms that exist in the White House. Looking at Michelle and the current Republican campaigning spouses, I cannot help but to ask the question, when will the outdated role of First Lady change? Hillary brought us hope, but 8 years later, we are in a quite discouraging position.

How can we expect gender norms in America to change when the highest American political office promotes and echoes traditional gender norms? Hillary Clinton has been the best example of a feminist First Lady, but because of the criticism she received, First Ladies to follow her have been cautious not to emulate her style. However, we have to realize that Hillary today is an exemplary female leader. She has opened doors for women to come and has been extremely successful. Hopefully, future First Ladies will follow in her footsteps and there will be a day when First Ladies do not have to be submissive helpmates who echo and

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promote America's unrealistic, constraining, and outdated family values.

Unfortunately, many girls and women of my generation think the playing field for women and men has leveled out. And have therefore stopped fighting for the feminist cause. However, after analyzing the roles of First Ladies, we see that there is a need for women to be aware and conscious of the unrealistic and constraining gender norms, which exist and limit them in society today. I hope that in the future, more First Ladies and women in general do not fear criticism. The fear of criticism is what held back the First Ladies of the past. We, as women, must reject the gender constraints placed on us. Hopefully one day, gender norms will be eradicated, but there's a long way to go until they are; we can start the slow process though by having First Ladies and the White House in general redefine American gender norms and family values.

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